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1403 Quadrant Circle • Landfall • $1,199,000

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229 Windy Hills • Windy Hills • $695,000

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2017 Northstar Place • Landfall • $629,000

Beautifully maintained executive home in Landfalll. Open floor plan with cathedral ceilings. Large first floor master suite with separate sitting area and French doors leading to the private terrace with broken views of the Dye Lake. Hardwood floors, granite kitchen counter tops, updated fixtures with new hot water heater, 2 year old windows and a 7 year old roof.

2 Sunset Avenue B • Wrightsville Beach • $1,895,000

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19 Comber Road • Landfall • $1,750,000

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Conveniently located off Greenville Loop Road, this executive residence offer great privacy and 2 1/2 acres. The painted brick exterior and fenced yard with towering hardwoods provide the classical setting for this Georgian inspired design. A cook's kitchen with marble counters opens to the family room and adjacent sun room.

1608 Dye Place • Landfall • $719,000

How about this million dollar view?! Special features include quartz counters, stainless appliances, hickory floors, powder room built as safe room and lawn maintenance by the association.

807 S. Third Street • Carolina Beach • $505,000

Pack your bags and come to the beach! Former model unit, this furnished immaculate 5 BR end unit luxury townhome comes with an elevator. It is decorated beautifully and sleeps 14, therefore it has been very popular on Airbnb with many repeat visitors generating over $40,000 annual rental income on a part time basis. This home has all the bells and whistles and comes with media room with a wet bar and foosball table, large living room, cozy den, two formal eating areas, outside deck off each bedroom, fire sprinkler system, upgraded finishes, and plenty of parking.

604 Arboretum Drive • Landfall • $477,750

Spectacular 1+ acre Landfall lot on the point overlooking the headwaters of Pembroke Jones Lake and the Jack Nicklaus Golf Course (Marsh #8). This south facing homesite is perfectly situated to capture lazy waterviews down the lake towards the Landfall Clubhouse. Enjoy the privacy, security and serenity that Landfall offers on this one of a kind lot.

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December 2019

Departments

13 Simple Life
By Jim Dodson

16 SaltWorks

19 Omnivorous Reader
By D. G. Martin

23 Drinking With Writers
By Wiley Cash

27 Annie Gray's Diary
By Annie Gray Sprunt

29 The Conversation
By Bill Thompson

35 True South
By Susan S. Kelly

36 Notes From the Porch
By Bill Thompson

40 A Day Away
By Susan Ladd

45 Salty Words
By Nan Graham

47 Birdwatch
By Susan Campbell

70 Calendar

75 Port City People

79 Accidental Astrologer
By Astrid Stellanova

80 Papadaddy
By Clyde Edgerton

Cover Photograph by Andrew Sherman

Photograph this page by Virginia Holman

Features

45 The Aurora
Poetry by Karen Filipski

46 Thistle Among the Pines
By Kimberly B. Sherman
Flora MacDonald and the Highland Scots of the Cape Fear

50 Christmas, Sweet and Savory
By Jane Lear
The spirit of the holidays begins in the kitchen. Cheese biscuits, gingerbread and garnet-hued poached pears are three simple yet festive ways to celebrate

58 A Holiday Blessing
Story & Photographs by Virginia Holman
To whom it may concern

60 A Stylish Survivor's Story
By William Irvine
Despite the ravages of fire and Florence, The Verandas still holds pride of place in the historic district

69 Almanac
By Ash Alder

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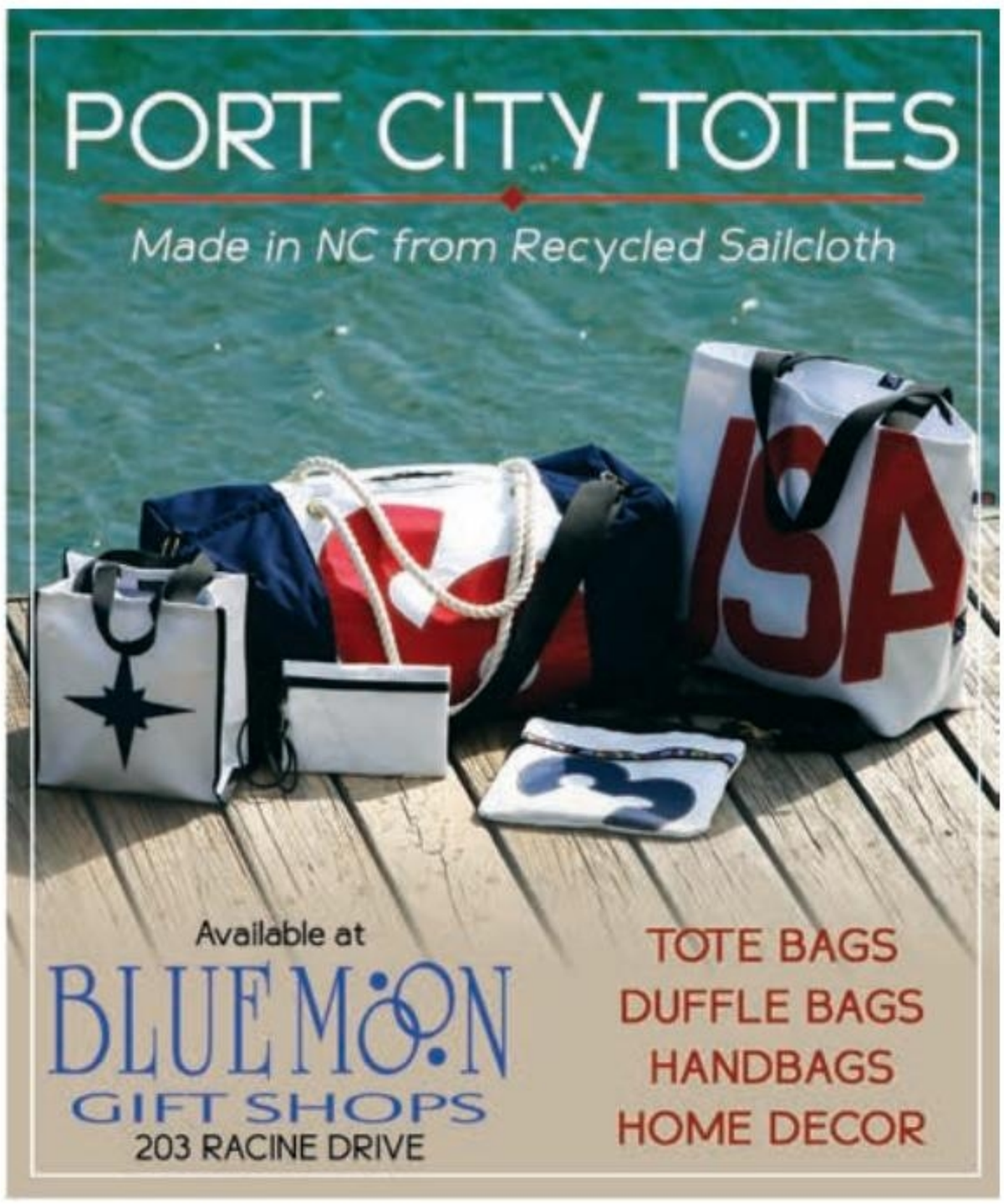
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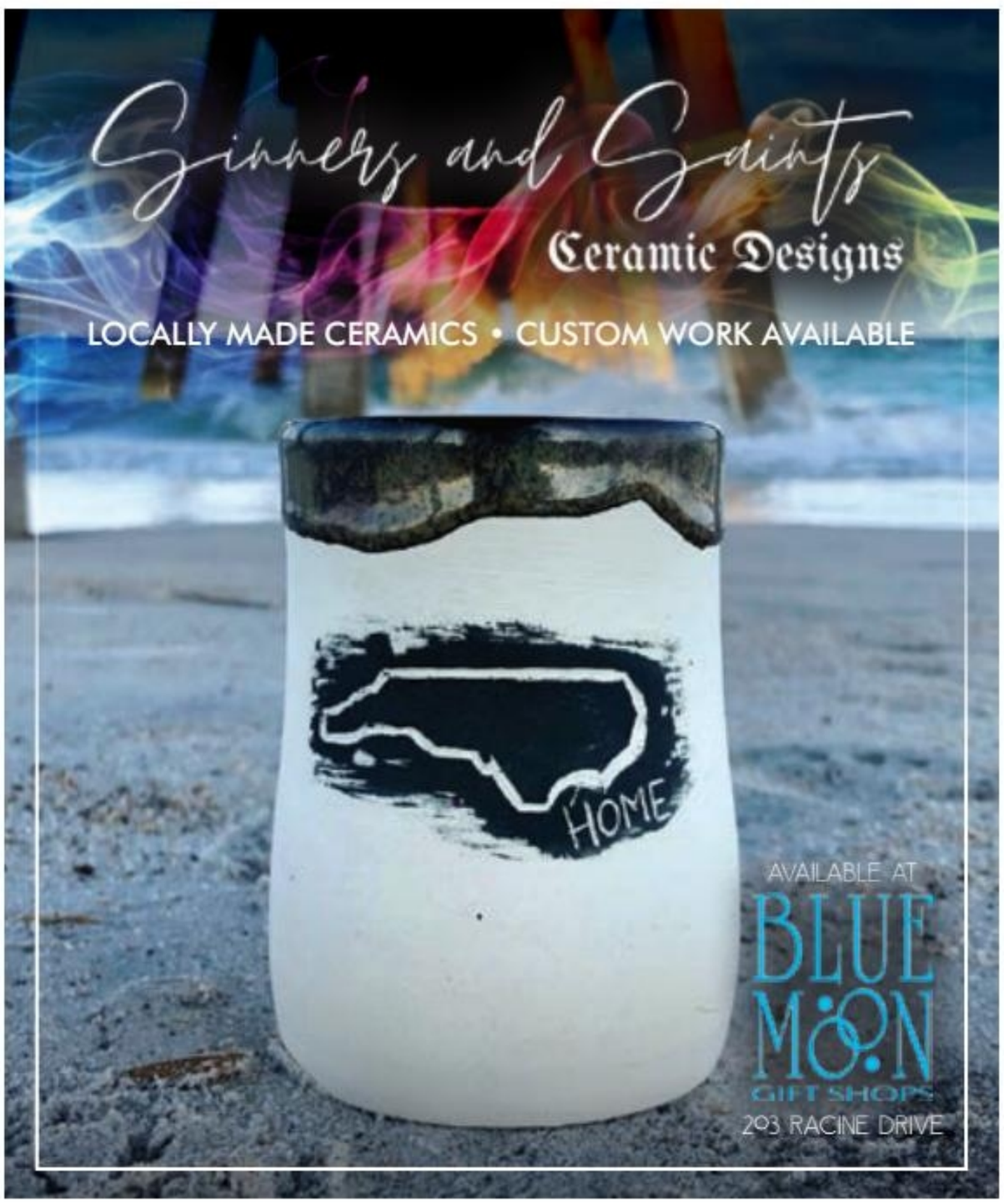
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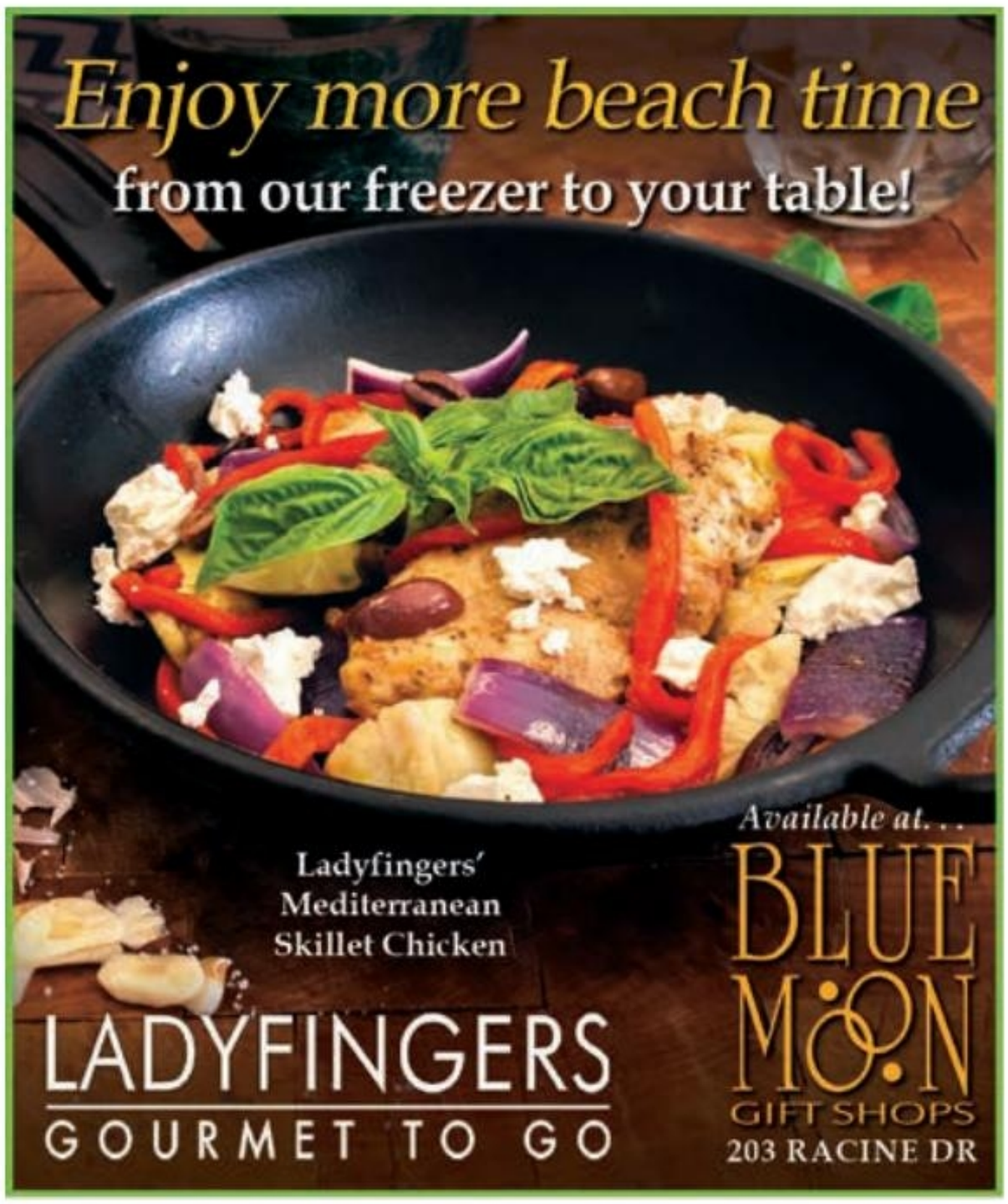
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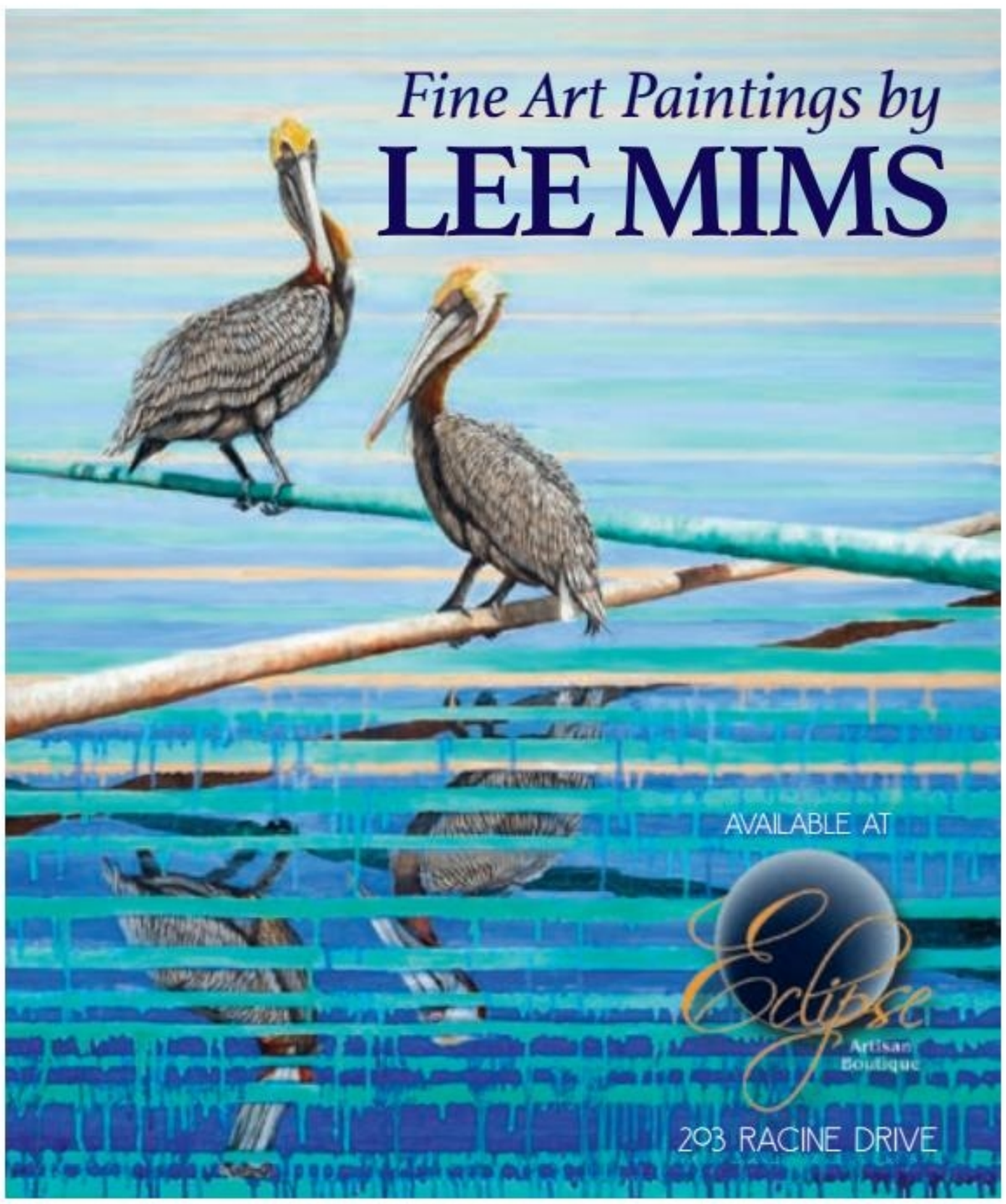
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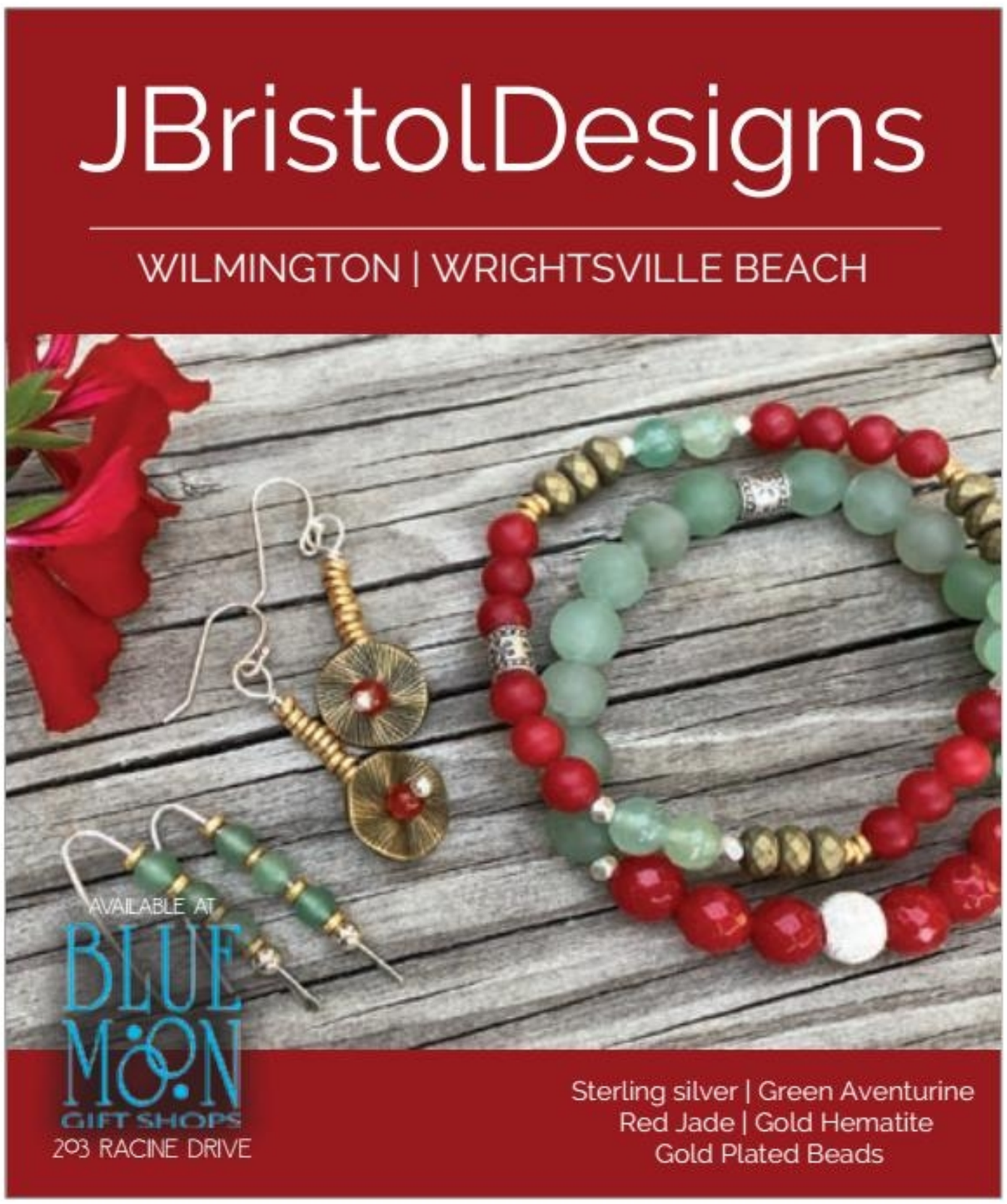
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A Walk in the Dark

The nocturnal world reveals its secrets – and the beauty of an Elephant Angel

By Jim Dodson

Every morning for the past few years, a couple of hours before sunrise, while much of the world has yet to stir, regardless of weather or season, my wife and I walk a mile with our dogs through the darkness. Sometimes a little farther than that.

Neither wind nor rain, neither sleet nor snow — and certainly not dark of night — can keep us from our appointed rounds.

What began as a simple way for two humans and three canines to get their feet and bloodstreams moving has become a daily ritual that seems almost second nature now, the one time during a busy week when we — the humans — have time to talk and walk or simply be together. We talk of many things or nothing at all, frequently walking in a mindful silence worthy of Benedictine monks.

We carry a flashlight to shine if necessary but prefer to travel by the light of the stars and an ever-changing moon, plus whatever illumination hails from the odd lighted porch or lamppost.

Fortunately our neighborhood has only a few street lights, which make night skies more vibrant and provide deep stretches of darkness where we rely on faith and trust that one of us won't step headfirst into an open manhole or fall over someone's curbed bag of leaves.

That's a risk I'm happy to take. We live in a world too full of clamor and noise, and save for those wee hours when maintenance crews at the nearby shopping center operate industrial-sized leaf blowers that can be heard for country miles (against city noise codes, by the way, and something that has many in the neighborhood up in arms). The predawn silence and stillness may be the best thing about a walk in the dark, a healing glimpse of a world that was. "Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom," said Francis Bacon.

Our two older dogs — Mulligan the aging mixed breed foundling (Queen bee, deaf in one ear) and Ajax the golden retriever dandy (pedigreed goofball) — know nothing of Bacon, except the kind they beg to eat, but do know the way by heart though the darkness, chugging bravely ahead. Gracie, the sweet young Staffordshire terrier we rescued from life on the streets, likes to pause and sniff the earth where others have passed, keeping a sharp eye out for breakfasting rabbits, still learning her way through a civilized world.

Darkness, it seems to me, gets a pretty bum rap.

As kids, we are programmed against the night by popular culture and to fear the darkness and everything that potentially lurks therein — the monster in the closet, the bogeyman beneath the bed, witches who consort with the moon, robbers waiting in the bushes, black cats and burglars on the prowl.

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Later in life, of course, it's the metaphorical darkness that drives the daylight narrative with news of yet another incomprehensible mass murder of innocents in broad daylight by some despondent loner enveloped by his own inner darkness.

Friends — and everyone has them — who've made the journey through the Stygian darkness of depression live in a state of perpetual twilight, unable to sleep, untethered from a world that seems to hold scant promise of joy or hope. Their journey back to the light is one of the bravest things you can witness.

Meanwhile, the Web's dark side is reportedly shadowing all of our lives, spinning fantastic conspiracies while stealing our identities and credit card numbers. Is it a coincidence that the television ads that run in the predawn hours aggressively peddle home security systems, identity protection and male impotence cures? Probably not. These are what we fear most in our darkest hours of the night.

And yet, it is that very darkness where we take refuge and rest and recharge batteries, snuggle down beneath the duvet, temporarily abandon all cares and set loose on travels through our dreams. For all its magnificent abilities to reveal the workings of living creatures, modern science still cannot fully explain why all living things — even honeybees — need sleep. But thankfully we do. And the best benefits of sleep occur, sleep experts agree, in a dark and silent place.

A campfire in the daytime seems, well, rather pale and pointless. But on a dark night in the wild, surrounded by the watchful eyes of living creatures great and small, what is more comforting than a crackling fire that sends up sparks to heaven when you toss on another log?

In her marvelous book *Learning to Walk in the Dark,* spiritual writer Barbara Brown Taylor points out that the human body requires equal amounts of darkness and light to function properly, an ancient circadian rhythm of sleeping and waking that matches the cycle of day and night, allowing natural healing properties in both man and nature to do their thing.

"I have learned things in the dark that I would never have learned in the light," Brown writes, "things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness."

"Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness," concurs the poet Mary Oliver. "It took me years to understand that this, too was a gift."

Madeleine L'Engle sagely chimes in from a wrinkle somewhere in time, "Maybe you have to know the darkness before you can appreciate the light."

Which brings us happily back to lights on our daily walk made mythical by the winter darkness.

Beginning in October (seemingly earlier every year), it's fun to see the year's latest crop of illuminated creatures of the night that appear on lawns weeks before Halloween — gigantic black cats, towering ghouls, giant spiders, fake graveyards, skeletal hands reaching up from the azaleas. It's all in good fun, meant to mock the very thing we are meant to fear: the mysterious darkness.

Our favorite by a wide margin is the Great Lighted Pumpkin that appears every year at the start of October, floating high in the limbs

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of an ancient white oak near the corner where we turn for home. He smiles benevolently upon us as if he gets the joke — a beacon of cheerfulness in a season of manufactured fright.

Come December — the hemisphere's darkest month — it's the deep winter darkness that makes the lights of our daily trek through the neighborhood such a visual feast, a kinetic pleasure. As the curtain comes down on another year in the life of this struggling old planet, we hopeful types dutifully light candles and build bonfires to politely rage against the notion of going gently into that good night.

As if to indicate our unwavering commitment to optimism in the face of present concerns, we string lights on trees and lampposts, erect illuminated reindeer and waving Santas, blinking constellations of shrubs meant to light the darkened way. Clearly, there is a message in this.

During the years we resided on a coastal hill in Maine, surrounded by several hundred acres of a deep beech and hemlock forest, our little ones lived for the annual lighting of trees around the property, particularly an elderly American beech that stood in the side yard off the eastern porch.

In order to get up into the limbs of the old tree, I needed a large step ladder and a healthy snort of good Kentucky bourbon for courage in order to finagle the tiny lights into the highest branches. Our resident squirts maintained that the creatures who resided in the surrounding forest — a peaceable kingdom that included a family of white tail deer, a lovesick moose who occasionally wandered over the lawn, a fat lady porcupine who waddled past and a flock of wild turkey, not to mention a couple mischievous made-up story time bears named Pete and Charley — needed our lit-up beech to brighten their cold winter nights.

Not everyone grasped this. The UPS guy, for example, wondered why we bothered to put up holiday lights on a forested hilltop where nobody but us could see them.

Before I could reply, my wee son Jack spoke up.

"The birds can see them," he calmly explained. "And so can angels."

One year, in any case, I forgot to check whether the current bulbs were still operational and carefully put up several strings only to discover they were dead as Jacob Marley's doorknocker.

In frustration, I went out and purchased several new strings of holiday lights and tested them before haphazardly flinging them into the limbs as darkness fell and an intense downpour of sleet began.

Upon flipping the switch, something remarkable happened, proof that children see things that grown-ups lose the ability to see without help.

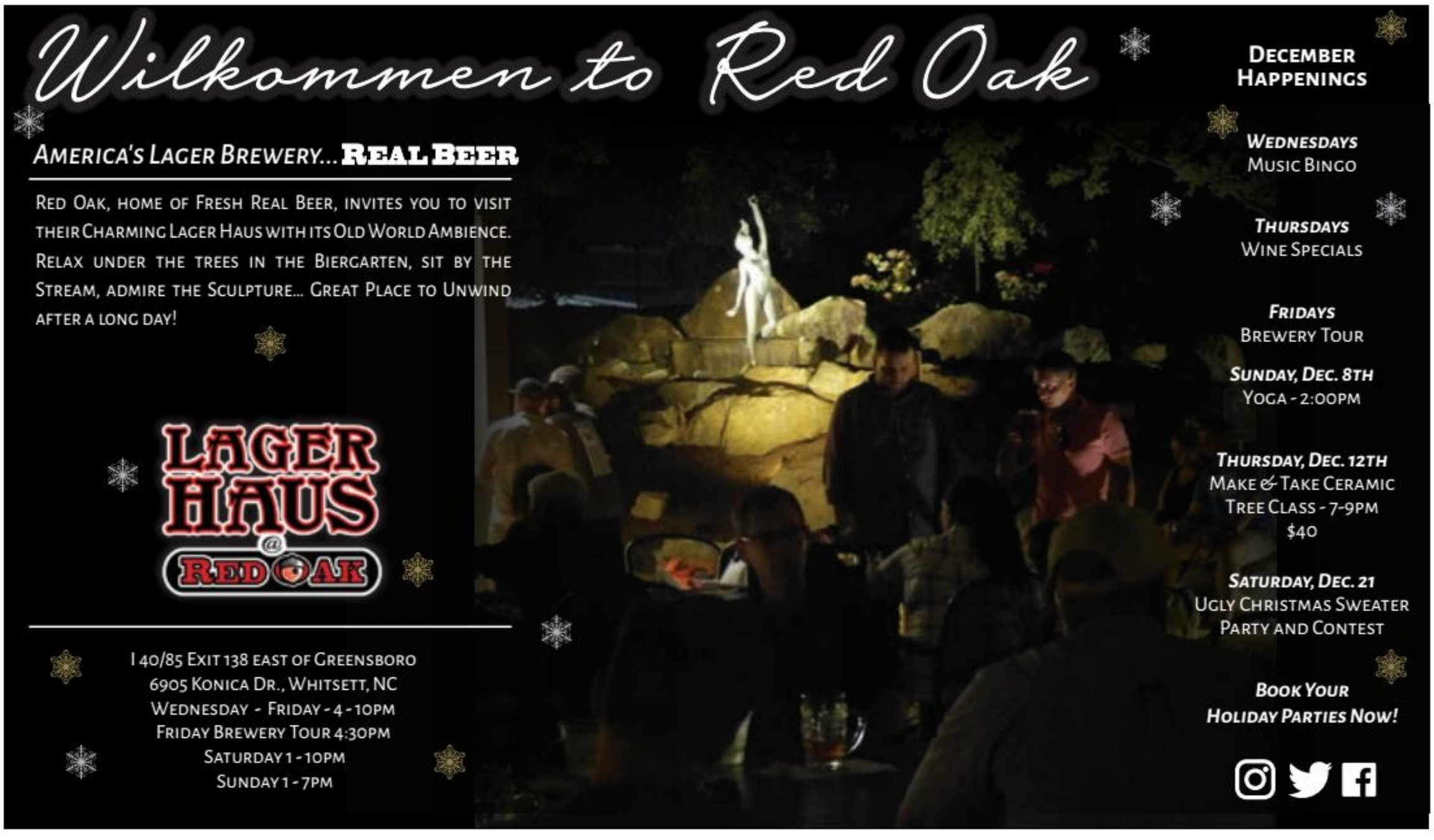
The old beech bloomed to life with glittering lights in the icy darkness and I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Look, Daddy," Jack said matter-of-factly. "An elephant angel."

By golly he was right. I can only describe what he saw — the outline of an elephant with wings, soaring heavenward — as exactly that.

A few days later, even the UPS guy, delivering Christmas presents from faraway Carolina, was deeply impressed.

Contact Editor Jim Dodson at jim@thepilot.com.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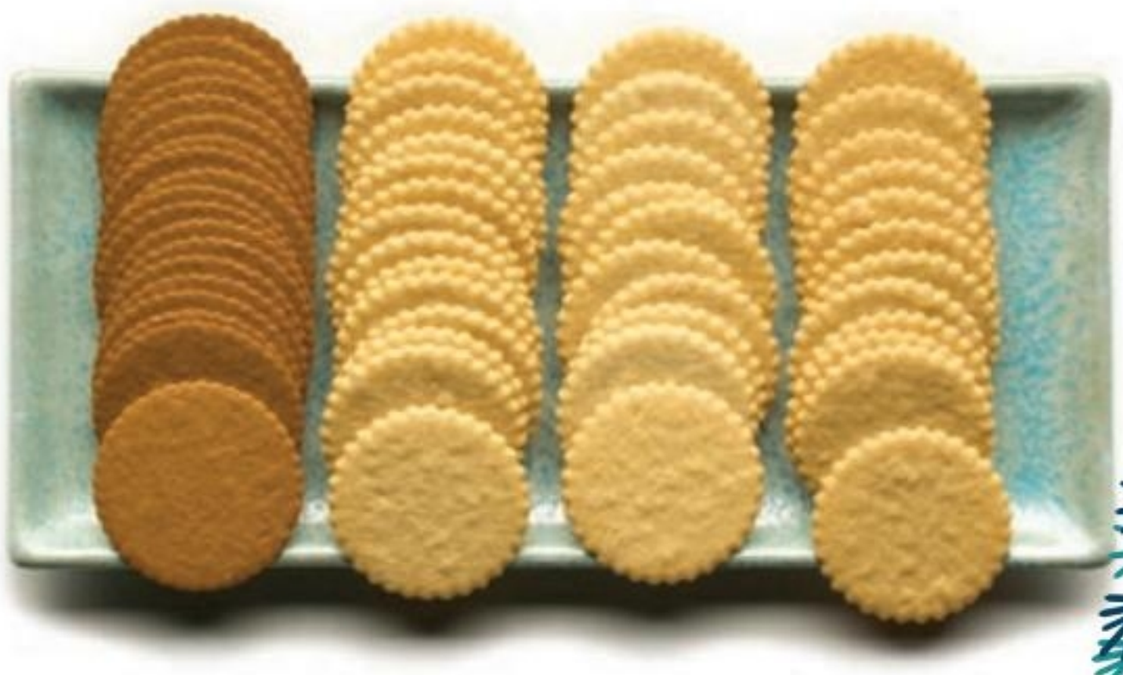

Treats for the Sweet

The Winston-Salem bakery Dewey's has been creating Moravian treats since 1930, and they are coming to Wilmington with a Christmas pop-up store. Sponsored by the Covenant Moravian Church, it's a great opportunity to stock up on Moravian sugar cakes, wafer-thin cookies in many flavors, stars and other Christmas items. The church benefits from a portion of the holiday sales. Through Dec. 24. Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. Mayfaire Town Center, 890 Town Center Drive (next to Regal Mayfaire Cinema in Santa's Workshop). For info: (910) 799-9256 or covenantmoravianwilmington@gmail.com.

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas

Poplar Grove Plantation will host its Merry Little Christmas Festival, featuring 60 arts and crafts vendors, a bonfire for toasting marshmallows, outdoor screenings of Christmas classics, including *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and various lawn games. The grounds and outbuildings will be open, and there are also candlelight tours of the manor house for an additional fee. Bring your blanket! There will also be a mailbox to send letters to Santa. Dec. 6-8, 13-14. Friday, 5-8 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 U.S. 17 North, Wilmington. For info: (910) 686-9518 or poplargrove.org.

Enchanted Airlie

In what has become a Wilmington Christmas tradition, load up the station wagon and come celebrate the season at Enchanted Airlie with a self-guided tour of the gardens, which are bedecked with holiday lights and displays. Local vendors will offer hot chocolate, popcorn and other treats. Tickets (per carload) are only sold in advance. Admission: $30-$55. Dec. 6-22, 5-7 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. Airlie Gardens, 300 Airlie Road, Wilmington. For info: (910) 798-7700 or airliegardens.org.

God Bless Us, Every One!

The Theatre Exchange's adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* takes place in a Depression-era "Hooverville" on the outskirts of St. Louis. Actor, historian and Thalian Executive Director Tony Rivenbark will reprise the role of Ebenezer Scrooge. Tickets: $28. Dec. 12-22, 7:30 p.m.; additional performances Saturday and Sunday at 3 p.m. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

Jingle Belles, Jingle Belles…

'Tis the season for a proper English tea party, and what better place to do it than the elegant Bellamy Mansion Museum? The Jingle Belles Holiday Tea is an annual fundraising event for the museum, which includes a menu of gourmet tea sandwiches, scones and desserts, along with hot tea and a champagne toast, followed by a mansion tour. Tickets: $50. Dec. 8-9, 1:30-4 p.m. Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington. For reservations, call Carolyn: (910) 251-3700, ext. 306

An 18th Century Christmas

Take a trip back in time and see how the American colonists celebrated Christmas. The Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site will host An 18th Century Christmas, with costumed interpreters giving guided tours of St. Philips Anglican Church. There will be Colonial refreshments, traditional games, and 18th-century crafts, including Moravian paper star-making. An authentic period candlelit service will take place in the ruins of the church at 5 p.m. Tickets: $5 per car for parking. Dec. 8, 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site, 8884 St. Philips Road SE, Winnabow. For info: (910) 371-6613 or nchistoricsites.org.

La Cage Aux Folles 2020

Thalian Hall's legendary New Year's Eve Gala will feature dinner, drinks and a live performance of the Opera House Theatre Company's production of the smash Broadway hit *La Cage Aux Folles*, a musical based on the book by Harvey Fierstein with lyrics and music by Jerry Herman. After the show there will be a live DJ, with karaoke and dancing, and a champagne toast at midnight. Tickets: $165 per person. Dec. 31, 7 p.m. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

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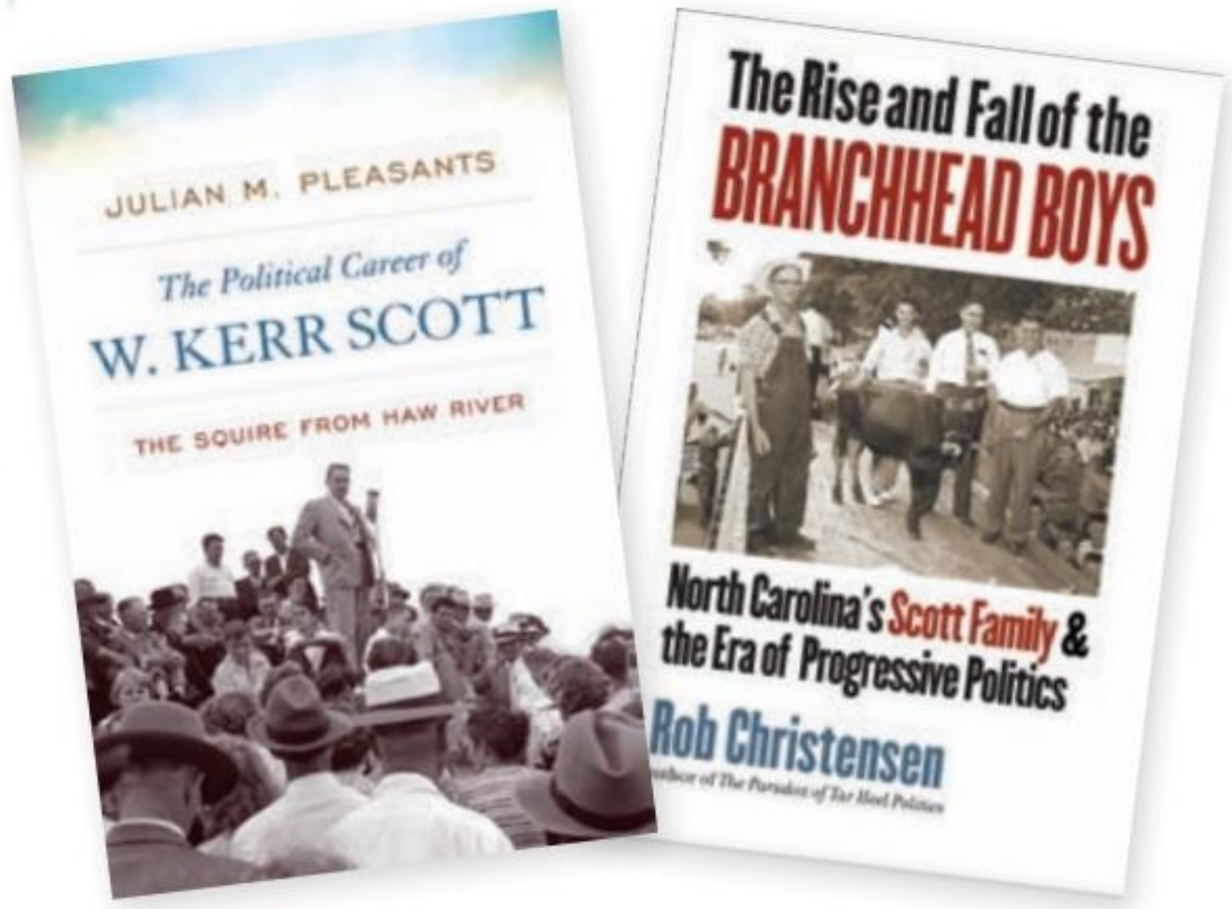
The political saga of a father and son


JULIAN M. PLEASANTS
The Political Career of
W. KERR SCOTT
THE SQUIRE FROM HAW RIVER
The Rise and Fall of the
BRANCHHEAD BOYS
North Carolina's Scott Family & the Era of Progressive Politics
Rob Christensen

By D.G. Martin

Anyone who wants to master North Carolina political history must try to understand how Kerr Scott, elected North Carolina's governor in 1948, could be both a liberal and a segregationist. Two books that can help are *The Political Career of W. Kerr Scott: The Squire from Haw River*, by retired University of Florida professor Julian Pleasants; and *The Rise and Fall of the Branchhead Boys*, by former *News & Observer* political reporter and columnist Rob Christensen.

Pleasants chronicles the exceptional life of Kerr Scott, who was governor from 1949 until 1953 and U.S. senator from 1954 until his death in 1958.

Scott, a dairy farmer from Alamance County, won election as commissioner of agriculture in 1936. In 1948, after using that office as a launching pad, he resigned and mounted a campaign for governor. He beat the favored candidate of the conservative wing of the party in the Democratic primary, which in those days was tantamount to election.

Once in office, Scott pushed programs of road paving, public school improvement and expansion of government services. Hard-working and hard-headed, plain and direct spoken, he appointed women and African-Americans to government positions.

Future governors Terry Sanford and Jim Hunt were inspired by his success. Hunt said, "If not for Kerr Scott I would never have run for governor. My family viewed Scott as our political savior . . . He improved our roads, our schools, and our health care."

Scott's commitment to common people, fair treatment for African-Americans, skepticism and antagonism toward banks, utilities and big business, and a pro-labor platform earned him a liberal reputation that was praised in the national media. In 1949, he appointed Frank Porter Graham, the popular and liberal president of the University of North Carolina, to fill a vacant seat in U.S. Senate. When Graham lost to conservative Willis Smith in the next election, Scott resolved to run against Smith in 1954 to avenge Graham's loss and reassert the power of the liberal wing of the party. When Smith died in office and Governor William Umstead appointed Alton Lennon, a conservative, to the seat, Scott ran against him in 1954 and won.

In the Senate, his liberalism did not extend to racial desegregation. He joined with other Southerners in Congress to fight against civil rights legislation. He signed the infamous 1956 Southern Manifesto, which urged resistance to the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision requiring the elimination of school segregation.

Scott died in office in 1958, leaving open the question of whether he would have won re-election in 1960.

Missing from Pleasants' excellent book is the story of the entire Scott family and its role in North Carolina political life. Christensen takes up that task. He follows the Alamance County farm family beginning with Kerr Scott's grandfather, Henderson, and his father, "Farmer Bob." Both were active in statewide farmers' organizations.

Christensen's important contribution to the Scott family saga is his account of the political career of Kerr's son, Bob. Born in 1929, Bob grew up on Kerr's dairy farm. Like his father, he became active in farm organizations and worked in political campaigns, including Terry Sanford's 1960 successful race for governor. By 1964, at age 35, he was ready to mount a statewide campaign for lieutenant governor. But two senior Democrats, state Sen. John Jordan and House Speaker Clifton Blue, were already running. Christensen writes, "In some ways Scott had broken into the line."

Nevertheless, with the help of powerful county political machines, he won a squeaker victory in a primary runoff over Blue.

OMNIVOROUS READER

Bob Scott used his new office to run for the next one, giving hundreds of speeches each year, and he won the 1968 Democratic nomination over conservative Mel Broughton and African-American dentist Reginald Hawkins.

The results of the 1968 presidential contest in North Carolina marked what Christensen calls "the breakup of the Democratic Party." Richard Nixon won; George Wallace was second; and Hubert Humphrey was third. Nevertheless, in the governor's race, Scott faced and beat Republican Jim Gardner.

Mountains of bitter controversies in the areas of race, labor, student unrest and higher education administration were to confront Bob Scott after he became governor of North Carolina in 1969. As governor, Scott followed his father's tradition of inviting friends to "possum dinners" with the main possum course accompanied with "barbecued spare-ribs, black-eyed peas, collard greens, bean soup with pig tails, corn bread, and persimmon pudding."

Christensen writes, "Scott may not have been the populist of his father, but he brought a common-man approach to Raleigh."

But times had changed. College campuses were erupting. Black anger was spilling into the streets. Historian Martha Blondi wrote that 1969 marked the "high water mark of the black student movement." Christensen writes, "During his first six months in office, Scott called out the National Guard nine times to deal with civil unrest."

In March, he sent more than 100 highway patrolmen to Chapel Hill to break a food worker strike and force the reopening of the student cafeteria, overruling the actions of UNC's president, William Friday, and the chancellor, Carlyle Sitterson. This action and similar strong measures against student-led disorders earned Scott praise by television commentator Jesse Helms and many others in the white community, "but he got different reviews from the black community."

Although he appointed the first black District and Superior Court judges, his pace of minority hiring and appointments was roundly criticized.

Increased desegregation of public schools resulted in more disruption. Speaking about the 1971–72 school year, Scott said, "Many schools were plagued by unrest, tension, hostility, fear, disturbances, disruptions, hooligan-

isms, violence and destruction."

In response to disturbances relating to school desegregation in 1971, Scott sent highway patrolmen and National Guard troops to Wilmington. Conflict there led to arrests, trials and prison sentences for the group of protesters who became known as the Wilmington Ten.

Bob Scott's stormy relations with President Friday continued as Scott "decided to undertake the reorganization of higher education as his political swansong." His proposal to bring all 16 four-year institutions under one 32-person board was adopted by the legislature. Scott expected the new organization would eliminate or minimize Friday's role. But Friday became president of the reorganized 16-campus system and led it until 1986.

Summing up Bob Scott's time in office, Christensen writes that his legacy is "far murkier" than his father's, in part because the state was "less rural, less poor, more Republican, and more torn by societal dissent, whether civil rights, Vietnam, or the counterculture."

Both Terry Sanford and Jim Hunt acknowledged their connection to Kerr Scott. But Bob Scott never bonded with either of them. The breach with Hunt became a public battle when Bob Scott challenged the incumbent Gov. Hunt in the 1980 Democratic primary. Scott was angry because Hunt had not supported his ambition to be appointed president of the community college system. Scott lost the primary to Hunt by a humiliating 70–29 percent margin.

Ironically, in 1983, when the community college presidency opened up again, Bob Scott won the job and served with distinction until his retirement in 1995.

Bob Scott died in 2009 and was buried at the Hawfields Presbyterian Church near the graves of his father and grandfather. Kerr Scott's tombstone reads, "I Have Fought a Good Fight . . . I Have Kept the Faith." Bob's reads, "He Also Fought a Good Fight and Kept the Faith."

D.G. Martin hosts North Carolina Bookwatch *Sunday at 11 a.m. and Tuesday at 5 p.m. on UNC-TV. The program also airs on the North Carolina Channel Tuesday at 8 p.m. To view prior programs go to http://video.unctv.org/show/nc-bookwatch/episodes/.*

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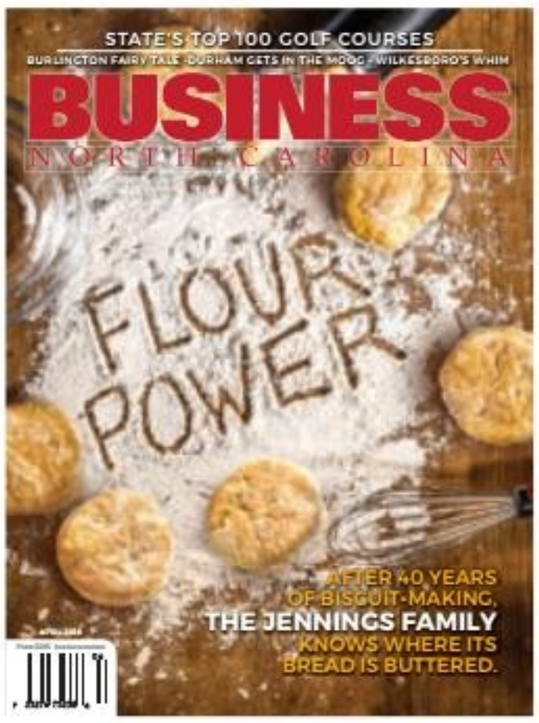
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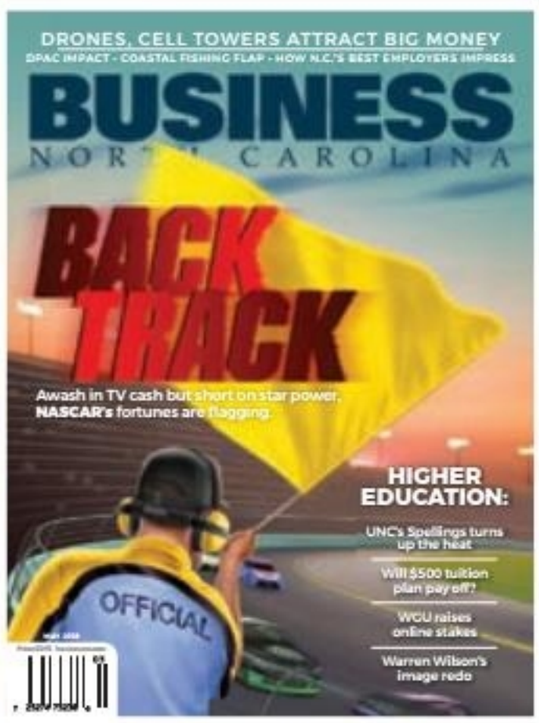
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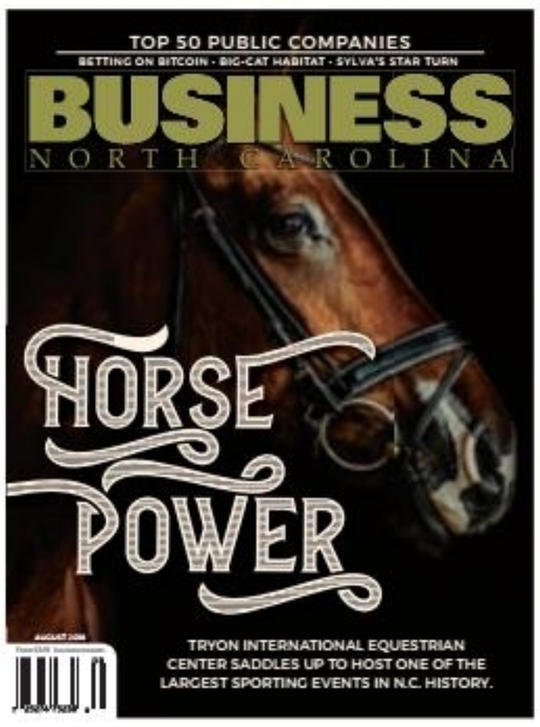
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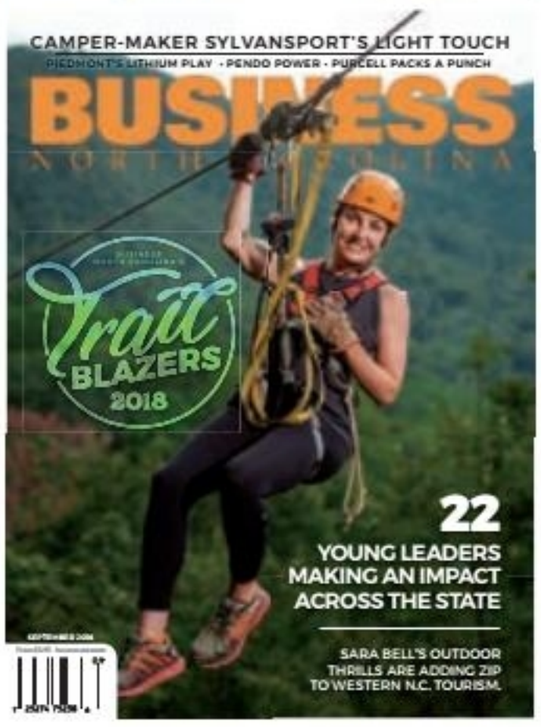
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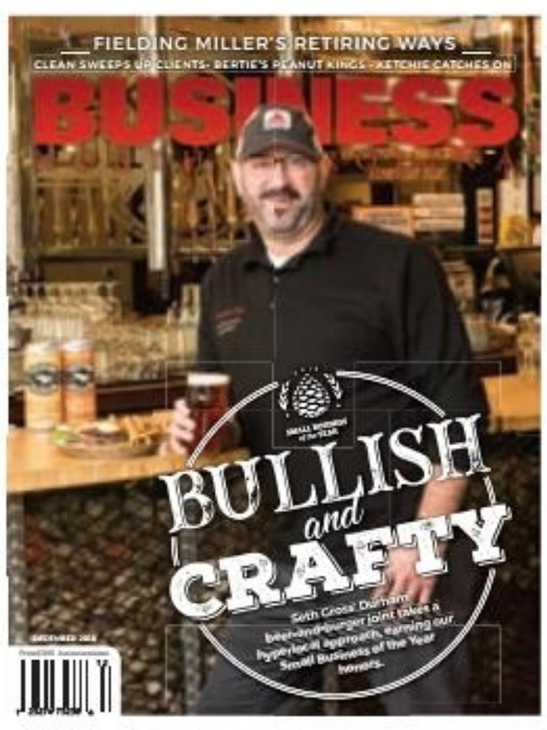
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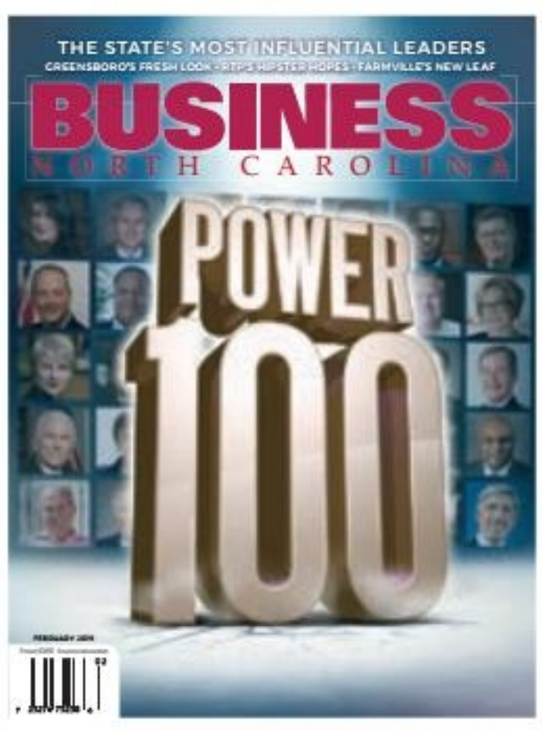

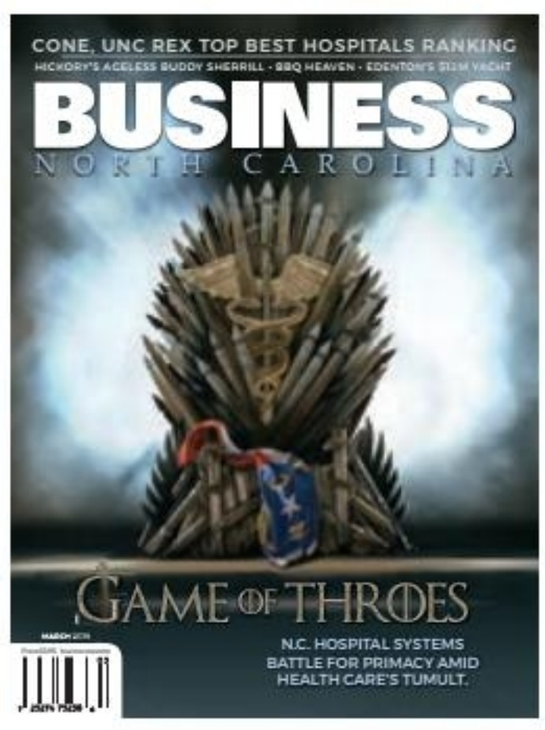
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The Long Road to Overnight Success

From poet to publisher, Emily Smith makes her mark with Lookout Books

By Wiley Cash · Photographs by Mallory Cash

I first met Emily Smith in September 2010 at the annual conference of the Southern Independent Booksellers' Alliance in Charleston, South Carolina. She was there with a Spartanburg publisher called Hub City Books, which was releasing a poetry collection by Ron Rash. Emily had designed the collection's cover. A year later, I saw Emily again, but this time I saw her photograph online: She was attending an awards dinner in New York City, where a book she had published was a finalist for the National Book Award in fiction. A lot had happened in the intervening year.

The book Emily had published was *Binocular Vision: New and Selected Stories*, by Edith Pearlman, a short story writer in her 70s who had long been a favorite of the literati, while never breaking through to a larger, critical audience. Pearlman's book was the first to be released by Lookout Books, a publishing imprint housed in the Publishing Laboratory inside the University of North Carolina Wilmington's creative writing department. Emily, along with editor emeritus Ben George, published Pearlman's book as Lookout's first release. The book would go on to be nominated for a number of prizes, and it would later win the National Book Critics Circle Award. It was quite the debut for a small press. *Publishers Weekly* called it a "knockout start," and Ron Charles of *The Washington Post* praised Lookout's release as "one of the most auspicious publishing launches in history."

There are centuries-old publishing houses in New York City that

would kill for a single season's title to receive the acclaim that *Binocular Vision* received, but there are simply too many bottles and not enough lightning. Or perhaps there is only one Emily Smith, and her journey from advertising executive to publisher of acclaimed books is perhaps as rare as the aforementioned glass-encased lightning.

In early November, Emily took a break from promoting the most recent Lookout title, *This Is My Body: A Memoir of Religious and Romantic Obsession*, by Cameron Dezen Hammon, to sit down with me over coffee at Social Coffee and Supply Co. on Wrightsville Avenue in Wilmington. It was a cool fall morning, and Emily and I found seats by the bright windows just inside the front door. Our conversation turned toward the first time we met in Charleston back in the fall of 2010.

"I'd gotten to know the folks at Hub City because I was their inaugural writer-in-residence," she says. "I went there as a poet, but part of the residency had me working 20 hours per week for the press."

"What were you doing before that?" I ask.

"I'd been a graduate student at UNC Wilmington," she says, "and I'd worked in the Publishing Laboratory here, which I now run."

But her experience in design and marketing, as well as her ability to network and build relationships, predates her time as a graduate student in Wilmington and writer-in-residence in Spartanburg. After finishing her undergraduate degree at Davidson, Emily spent several years in advertising at J. Walter Thompson in Atlanta. "We worked with big clients," she says. "Ford Motor Company, 20th Century Fox, Domino's Pizza. But I burned out. I knew it wasn't what I wanted to do."

She left Atlanta and returned to Davidson, where she worked in the Advancement office, forging relationships with alumni and the community, and raising money for the university. But something was steering her toward writing, and she enrolled as a poetry student in the MFA program at UNC Wilmington. After finishing her degree and serving as the writer-in-residence at Hub City in Spartanburg, she returned to Wilmington as the interim director of the Publishing Laboratory in 2007.

In her role as interim director, Emily found a distributor to ensure that the Publishing Lab's titles were sold beyond the campus

and outside of Wilmington. When a national search began for the permanent director, Emily decided to apply. "I thought, it would be silly not to try for this after doing this job for a year," she says. She got the job and forged a dynamic partnership with Ben George, who at the time served as editor of *Ecotone*, the university's national literary magazine. The two joined forces to found Lookout Books, which they envisioned as a literary imprint dedicated to publishing women, debut writers, and overlooked work by established authors.

"Ben came to UNCW with a reputation as a meticulous, thoughtful editor," Emily says. "And I knew the other side of the business. I had an advertising and marketing background. I knew the design part from working at Hub City. I knew how to work as a small press and handle distribution."

After the success of Edith Pearlman's *Binocular Vision*, Lookout Books quickly garnered national attention, and the press has consistently delivered critically acclaimed and award-winning books by both established and debut authors.

I ask Emily about the press's current release, *This Is My Body*, by Cameron Dezen Hammon. "It's the story of someone who grew up culturally Jewish and then converted to evangelical Christianity post-9/11," she says. "9/11 was a time in which everyone and everything felt spiritual, and Cameron was caught up in it. She converted and moved with her musician boyfriend to Houston, where they performed music at an evangelical church." The longer she stayed in the church the more she found herself caught up in a misogynistic culture that limited her to a gender role that defined both her faith and spiritual talents. "It's a story of seeking something and discovering something else," Emily says.

I cannot help but think about Emily doing the same, setting out on a search that took her from advertising executive in Atlanta to graduate student in Wilmington to writer-in-residence in Spartanburg and back to Wilmington, where she would publish titles that would make Lookout Books an overnight literary sensation.

Wiley Cash lives in Wilmington with his wife and their two daughters. His latest novel, The Last Ballad, *is available wherever books are sold.*

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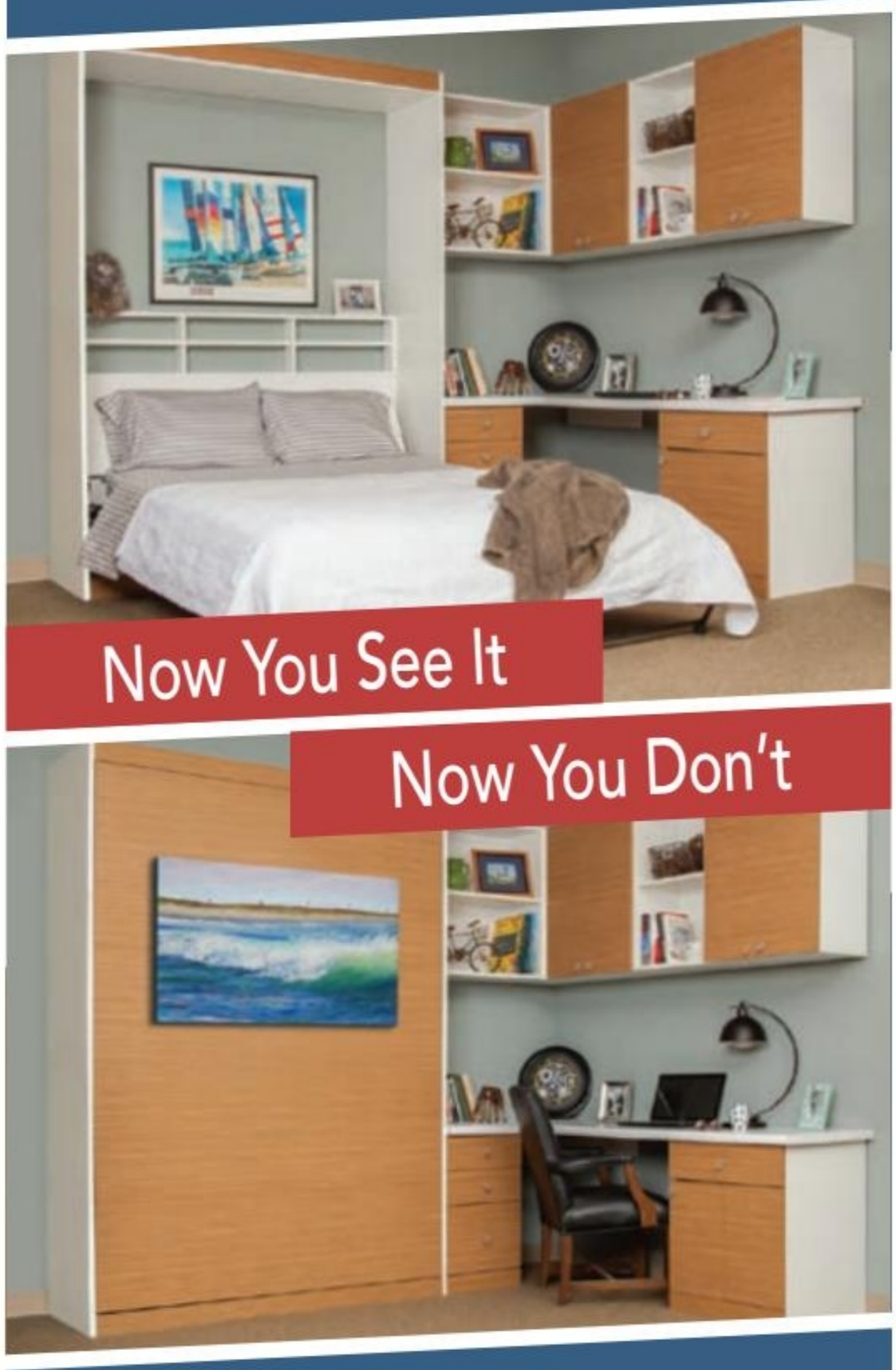

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'Tis the Season!

In merry search for the worst best present

By Annie Gray Sprunt

I embrace the saying "Your presence is the only present I need."

Being on the receiving end of presents has always been uncomfortable for me. It might have started the Christmas of 1990 — allow me to digress and confess — I was "the type." Which means I was the type of girl who wanted nothing more than to be a bride. I'm not proud but I'm honest. I wanted to pick out china and have dinner parties. Sadly, I had no career aspirations or lofty ambitions. My spirit animal was Donna Reed; in hindsight, it should have been Mary Tyler Moore.

It was Christmas Eve and I was under the delusion that I was getting an engagement ring from my beau. Fingernails polished (Revlon's Cherries in the Snow), hairdo done, with my much-rehearsed feigning surprise act ready to go . . . but alas, no ring. (You might ask what the present was instead of a ring: new floor mats for my car and a keychain.) He did put a ring on my finger the following week, but the Christmas trauma train had left the station.

I should have been conditioned throughout my life. My mother is fabulous and delightful in ways too numerous to count, but gift-giving has never been her strong suit, despite the fact she spends the entire year shopping for Christmas presents. Let's just say that her gifts have been "regifted" more than once. For example, the winking Santa felt appliqué toilet lid cover was regifted, posthaste, as was the Nativity crèche with the characters dressed in patriotic Fourth of July costumes. Seriously. When my daughter moved to San Diego, my mother graciously wanted to give her a going-away present . . . which was . . . an umbrella. Very thoughtful, if you are moving to Seattle or London, but let's just say Jim Cantore doesn't spend much time in the sunny climes of San Diego.

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ANNIE GRAY SPRUNT

I'm not saying my mother isn't generous; she most certainly is. Once she asked if I knew of anyone who might want my dearly departed father's old underpants. I kid you not. If an item is on sale, it's her catnip. The steeper the discount, the more she wants it. It might not be anything that you want, not your size or your color, but if its 95 percent off, she's going to get it. Essentially, if everyone in New Hanover County passed it up on the clearance sale rack, it is going to be wrapped up and under her Christmas tree, ready to go. Don't get me wrong, I love a good bargain, but there might be a reason it's on the clearance sale rack.

It was 1986 and the "it" toy was Corky, the talking doll with red curly hair. Corky had a pre-programmed cassette installed in its back that played syrupy sweet Corky-talk. For some unknown reason, my Aunt Virginia wanted one for Christmas. Her husband, Uncle Raymond, was the grand poobah of practical jokes. He did indeed grant his wife's wish for a Corky doll, but recruited his prankstery friend Lem to record over the Corky message with profanity-laced vitriol that would even make the current administration blush.

So as an homage to our mothers, my cousin Virginia and I compete each year for who can win at giving the BEST WORST Christmas present. The search begins the day after Christmas, and the competition is brutal. She is great at finding cocktail napkins or dishtowels with pithy remarks, like "I like to give homemade gifts for Christmas, which child would you like?"

Last year, I won! I searched high and low to find the BEST WORST present and lo and behold, I found Shave and Play Barbie. I'm sure it was a counterfeit Barbie but Barbie-ish nonetheless. She was resplendently covered in a full beard and caveman-like body fur. (Envision a voluptuous Sasquatch.) Faux Barbie came complete with a Barbie-size bubble gum-colored pink razor. (Faux Barbie styptic pencil not included.)

I'm not a complete nimrod about receiving gifts, I would never refuse a kidney if I ever needed one because that would be just plain rude. And I would graciously accept, with pleasure, a lovely bottle of Sancerre. Yes, I *do* know that it *is* the thought that counts, so save your hard-earned money for a gag gift for your cousin, and when it comes to me, no gifts — please!

Annie Gray Sprunt is a lifelong Wilmingtonian, award-winning mother, and self-deprecating bon vivant.

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Kevin, Meg McBride, Valerie, Michael

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK STEELMAN

By Dana Sachs

Meg McBride: Operations Director, Hope Recuperative Care

You've recently converted two residential houses in Wilmington into a new facility called Hope Recuperative Care. Who are your guests?

We provide temporary housing to people who have no place to go when they leave the hospital. In order to stay here, you have to be experiencing homelessness to some degree, either living on the streets, in a car, maybe in an emergency shelter, or in a place that's unfit for human habitation. And you've had a health crisis. You're medically ready to leave the hospital, but you are not ready to return to life as you were living it.

So, your guests aren't yet strong enough to go out on their own?

Yeah. Think of this as a gigantic bed and breakfast. We're totally non-clinical. We don't do any wound care, or toileting or bathing. When you come here, you have to be able to do those simple things. If people need some type of medical assistance, we work with New Hanover Regional Medical Center to arrange additional care.

Did anything like this exist in Wilmington before you opened in January?

For three years, the hospital worked with a program that operated out of a motel on Carolina Beach Road. They kept two rooms on rent all the time, but there wasn't 24/7 case management and oversight. The model needed improvements, so after that project closed we wanted to build on that.

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How did you get involved in the efforts to open this new facility?

I work under a grant at NHRMC as a disability advocate specifically to help homeless people. About 50 percent of homeless people are also disabled, so we help them access benefits. When the earlier program stopped, the hospital and some nonprofits started meeting: "How are we going to get recuperative care up and running?" That was the question.

And what was the answer?

The answer was an unlikely friendship, a relationship between two sacred organizations — the Anchor Methodist Church and Winter Park Baptist Church — working with a secular organization — New Hanover Regional Medical Center — in a collaborative partnership. I'm a person who feels called to ministry, and this place where organizations with very different missions work together is incredibly exciting.

What brings you to this work, personally?

My first husband was a hemophiliac, and before 1980 the blood supply was not safe. He and I were born in '69. When our second son was a year old, my husband got pneumonia. We were 24 years old. And then he got shingles and some other weird things. It didn't make sense. An infectious disease doctor took one look at us and said, "Y'all are getting tested for HIV-AIDS." I was like, "*What??*" I didn't know that hemophiliacs were getting AIDS. He was positive, but the kids and I were negative. There is no explanation for that. It's a miracle. He was sick for 12 years before he died. In the early '90s, health care workers were really uncertain about AIDS. I would have to advocate for him. I learned how to demand good care that's fair and just, and in a way that gets something done. That experience is now being used for good. I don't take credit for it. I believe that God was preparing something.

Were you religious then?

No. I hated God. I was raised Catholic, so in my mind I was being punished.

You're a Methodist now?

I am. I've landed in the Methodist Church. The Methodists have social principles.

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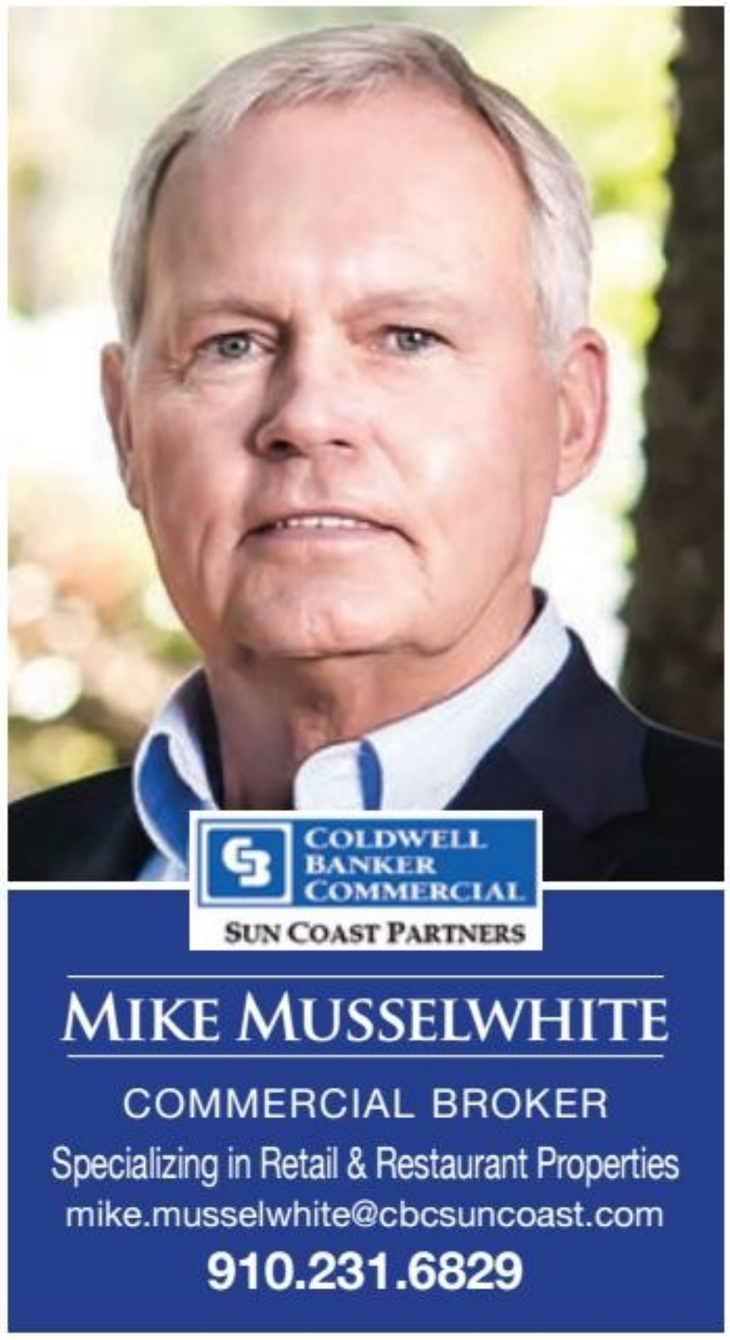

THE CONVERSATION

Social justice. This isn't just about caring for people who are homeless and sick. There's a wider issue. Why is homelessness a problem in the first place? What are we doing to address that as the community of Wilmington? How do we participate through the secular and the sacred?

This isn't just about caring for people who are homeless and sick. There's a wider issue.

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Can you describe the people you care for here?

A lot of them have diabetes and amputations. Three gentlemen have had throat cancer. One of them died about two weeks ago. He was private. I suspect that he was living behind a McDonald's. We hosted him for four months. He was a wonderful person — gentle and incredibly appreciative. We did a memorial service and some of the people from the McDonald's came. They told the most beautiful stories about him. He would come every day and keep the restaurant orderly. He would unclog the toilet. Oh my gosh, they wept.

Are your guests mostly men?

We've definitely had more men. In New Hanover County, there are a greater number of homeless men than women. We've had maybe eight women come through. We had a girl who was 22 or 23 with a very complicated digestive problem. She needed surgery. She was staying with her grandfather, who was abusing her. Because

of that situation, she would return to the emergency department a lot. We get a lot of funding from NHRMC, and we had promised that we would help keep people out of their emergency department. So, the hospital said, "Can you please take her? Let's just stabilize her." So, we brought her here, and she didn't go to the hospital the entire time. In fact, not a single one of our guests has returned to the hospital within 30 days after discharging to our facility.

What role does religion play at HRC?
What happens here that's really spiritual — I won't even say Christian, but maybe a little — is that every morning at 8:30 we go over to the table and we do about 15 minutes of daily prayer. It's very social-justice oriented. Whoever wants to come comes. And the other thing that we do that's Christian is we pray before dinner. We're always starving, so it's short and sweet.

How might the potential sale of the hospital affect your program?
The nonprofits have been promised that their relationships will be valued. Honestly, there are so many "what-ifs" that I'm not even worried about it. Since we opened, we have saved the hospital the expense of covering over 1,000 bed days in charity care. It's super-impressive.

How has this project turned out differently from what you expected?
We had all these expenses that exceeded expectations, like transportation, medication, utilities and food. This was our first year, so we are now working toward increasing our budget and finding new sources of financial support. But, in general, everything we planned for — like, we planned for the worst things that we could imagine — didn't happen. And all the things that we didn't expect, which are beautiful, have happened.

Like what?
All the small miracles that happen every day.

Dana Sachs' latest novel, The Secret of the Nightingale Palace, *is available at bookstores, online and throughout Wilmington.*

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Christmas Stream of Consciousness

It's a wrap

By Susan S. Kelly

Curse people who send early Christmas cards. Go to attic to find Christmas card basket. Create Christmas card list Excel sheet. Begin Shutterfly Christmas card process with family photo with attendant start-overs. Hit "submit." Hit "submit." Hit "submit." Curse Shutterfly and start emailing people to find out new addresses instead. Wrap a present. Begin debating Christmas Eve dinner. Shrimp and grits? But we have grits at breakfast. Ribs? But getting sauce out of linen napkins is impossible. Switch to red napkins instead of white for Christmas Eve dinner. Debate polishing silver. Reflect upon idiocy of having scheduled various doctor appointments in December. Buy Christmas stamps. Create Christmas gift Excel sheet. Ask sister for the hundredth time what our in-law spending limit is. Ask sister what our spouse spending limit is. Ask sister what our niece and nephew spending limit is. Vow for the hundredth time not to do this next year. Wrap a present. While in Lowe's, debate buying mace spray for daughters-in-laws' Christmas stocking. Reject idea. Unfold a dozen tablecloths to try to find the ones that fit card table, table for six, and table for eight. Vow to organize linens in January. Debate polishing silver. Make stack for Christmas cards that need a handwritten note along with printed greeting. Make stack of envelopes you didn't send cards to that you will if you have any left over. Wrap a present. Check cotton twine for tying tenderloin tail. Check Worcestershire bottle level for seasoning tenderloin. Check bourbon and cognac and rum levels for eggnog. See if mini blowtorch gun has enough ammo to make crème brûlée. Create Christmas food Excel sheet. Begin grocery list. Iron leftover usable ribbons. Wish for the hundredth year you had decent to/from gift tags. Wish for the hundredth time you hadn't bought the cheap wrapping paper at TJ Maxx. Get out empty boxes. Try, for the 33rd year, to figure out lengths of expensive ribbon so that there's enough to tie a bow at the top of the box. For the 33rd year, fail. Bring Christmas placemats downstairs. Bring all Christmas china downstairs. Take regular china upstairs, stash under beds, and hope you remember where you put it. Empty sugar into Christmas china sugar bowl. Empty salt and pepper shakers into Christmas salt and pepper shakers. Wrap a present. Debate polishing silver. Hand-address Christmas card envelopes, insert card, stamp with return address, affix postage, lick. Repeat 130 times. Feel unattractively smug and superior for hand-addressing all Christmas cards. Begin pile for Christmas cards from people you hadn't intended to send one. Search stores for candles with Christmassy scent to disguise ongoing terror of old-person-house smell. Discover Christmassy is a word. My computer recognizes it. Who knew? Take off exercise clothes, put on makeup, and hit the stores. Buy more Red Wine Out spray. Buy ZingZang for bloodies before it sells out. Search four different grocery stores for Nabisco Famous Chocolate Wafers. While in Bed, Bath & Beyond, debate buying silver polish and Goof Off for daughter-in-laws' stocking stuffers. Reject idea. Debate other possibly fun but likely worthless stocking stuffers. Hardboiled egg slicer? Do they still like Big League Chew? Scout possible magnolias in public parks to steal for decorations. Realize the gold-and-black Christmas ornament you bought for a Wake Forest fan is actually an Appalachian State Yosef, not a Demon Deacon. Wrap it anyway and decide to fake surprise on Christmas morning. Wrap a present. Reshape wired wreath bow that's been dangling from a clothes hanger in the attic. Wonder if this will be the year you finally fall down the attic steps and break your neck getting down the decorations. Put "day to get tree" on husband's calendar. Move furniture upstairs to make room for tree. Find plastic sheet so overfilling tree stand doesn't ruin carpet. Again. Go to tree lot for wreath and discover it doesn't open until 10. Return to tree lot later the same day. Wrap a present. Lay fire. Wrap a present. Undertake too many things in one day and realize there's nothing for supper. Run out of Christmas stamps and do not care that you're using flags or the self-stick freebies from the Salvation Army for return addresses because the stamp pad gave up the ghost. Blow dust off crystal goblets. Change white soap in powder room to something vaguely green. Wrap a present. Go to four different grocery stores searching for "superfine sugar" for eggnog recipe. Create what-to-wear-to-which-thing-when Excel sheet. Ignore sister's suggestion to download some app called "Calm." Drive around and drive around and drive around hunting for this year's location of pop-up Dewey's bakery store for Moravian Sugar Cake. Debate polishing silver. Scrounge around looking for bent, folded nameplates for tables from previous years because you worked so hard on the calligraphy. Reflect on irony of having to save all the homemade gift treats for Christmas Eve and day, knowing there will be leftovers just when you've decided to try and not gorge anymore. Schedule manicure. Cancel appontment upon realization that manicure will be ruined polishing silver. On December 21, pitch all Excel lists because you don't care anymore and what's going to happen is going to happen. Begin New Year's resolution list with Learn How to Use Excel.Wrap a present.

Susan S. Kelly is a blithe spirit, author of several novels, and a proud grandmother.

Mama's House

Somewhere down the dirt road of memory

By Bill Thompson

We sold Mama's house a little while back, just before she died. We realized that she wasn't coming back from the nursing home and she told us to sell it. So, as always, we did what Mama told us to do.

Of course, I miss the house. It's where I grew up. It held all those memories of family and friends that made up my life for almost 20 years. But it has also released those memories now to run rampant through my mind, to pop up unexpectedly. It is right next door to the Hallsboro Baptist Church, which I still attend, so I see the house at least once a week, and as I walk from the parking lot to the church, I can't help taking a look at the old house. I try not to get too sentimental about it. Good folks live there now and, frankly, it only takes a minute to walk across the parking lot, so I don't have a lot of time to think about the past right then.

But sometimes when I'm driving through rural North and South Carolina, I'll see something that will make me think of the little house in Hallsboro back in a different time. The late 1940s and '50s were great years for most of us. A world war had ended, family members had come home from fighting in places we had never heard of before the war, and prosperity was knocking on every door.

A surefire trigger for memories is a dirt road. Admittedly, I don't travel on them much anymore, mainly because there aren't many left. I was coming home from Southport the other day and took a voluntary detour down a dirt road I hadn't been on in a long time. It had rained just enough to settle the dust and not create a boggy mess.

Driving on a dirt road that wasn't dusty made me think of Mama's house. I remember her fussing about all the dust that arose from the road in front of the house. There was not a lot of traffic on the road, about as many mules and wagons as automobiles, but to Mama each car intentionally created dust that would seek out the open windows during the hot summer days and settle on her furniture. One of my first chores was dusting furniture.

When I was thinking about writing this story, I called the department of transportation in Whiteville to find out when the Hallsboro road was first paved. Mr. Kenneth Clark, the district engineer for the Division of Highways, very kindly looked it up and gave me a history of the road. It was not until about 1955 that the whole road was paved with asphalt. Other substances had been used but not what we now call permanent pavement.

There were plenty of children in Hallsboro back then, and my sister Linda's closest playmates lived just on the other side of the churchyard from our house. Mrs. Bernice Ray was on the corner of the dirt street, and Paul and Maude Wyche lived in the house beside her. They later moved to a bigger house just through the woods behind our house. There was no parks and recreation department in Hallsboro then or

now, but the churchyard was big and grassy and had a dirt driveway and a few spindly young cedar trees. That was our playground. We made up games to fit the number of people in the churchyard. A few years ago, the church underwent some significant repairs and several softballs, baseballs, footballs, round rubber balls of various sizes, remnants of kites and other similar items were recovered from the crevices of the church roof.

Our house was the next to the last house before you left Hallsboro going north. My Aunt Lucille lived in the last house right beside ours. Past her house was all woods and ditches and dirt road, a kind of extension of our playground. As I was driving down the dirt road coming from Southport, I saw two boys squatting down next to a ditch that ran off into the woods from the dirt road. I don't know what they were doing, but sometimes Paul and I would look for crawfish in the ditches. We probably found some, but I don't know what we did with them. I'm pretty sure we didn't eat them. Sometimes we'd find minnows in a pool in one of the ditches. We'd take them home, nurture them, then give them full burial rites the next day.

There are not very many good memories of Hurricane Hazel remembered by folks who lived through that tragedy. But for my playmates and me in Hallsboro, Hurricane Hazel added to our recreation area by creating some of the most elaborate "forts" and "camps" you can imagine. Picture large oak trees and pine trees slain by the hurricane, the giant roots coated with mud and the fallen treetops forming ladders parallel to the ground. When the mud dried it created an abundance of ammunition for dirt fights between the fallen forts.

As I write this, I realize I haven't written anything about Mama's house except its location. Maybe that's because growing up in a small rural town in the South in the middle of the 20th century was a great time to be alive, a story all its own. Maybe it is because the house was just one part of the great adventure we created with our imaginations. Imagine that . . . dust and all.

Bill Thompson is a regular Salt contributor. His newest memoir, Tuxedos & Pickup Trucks, *is available on Amazon and wherever books are sold.*

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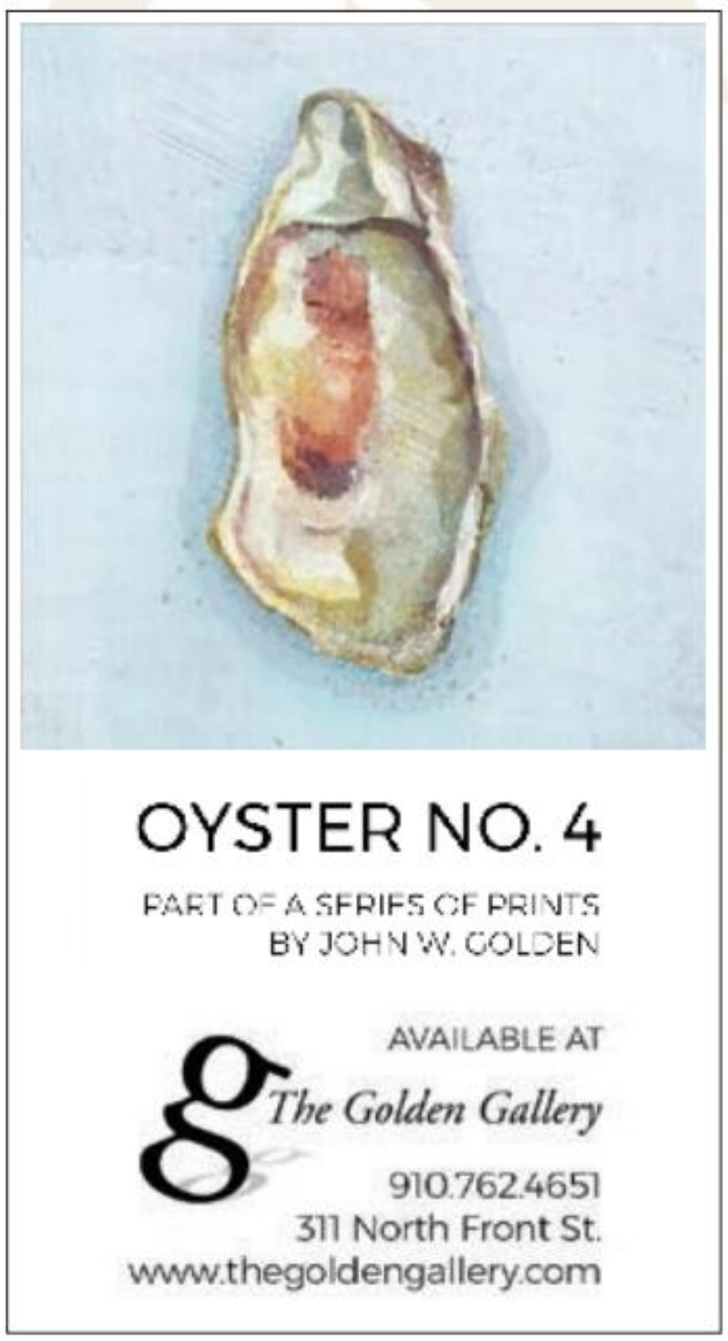

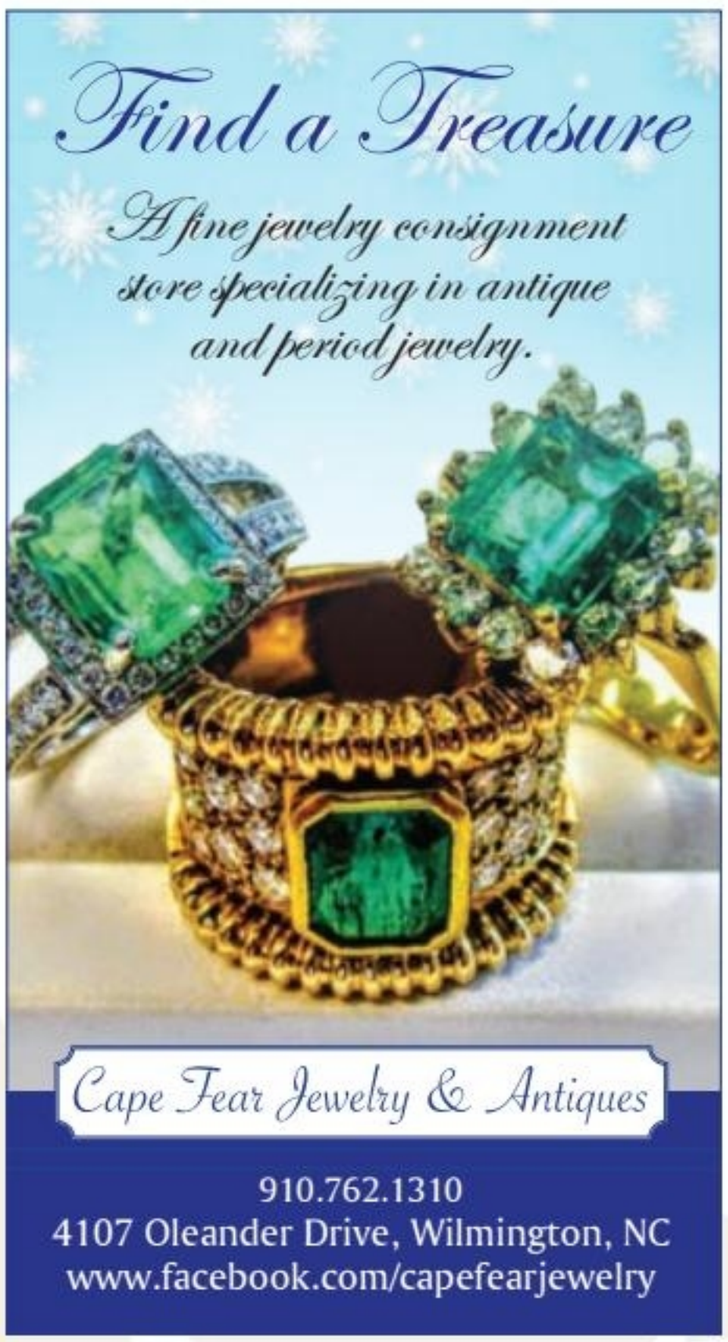

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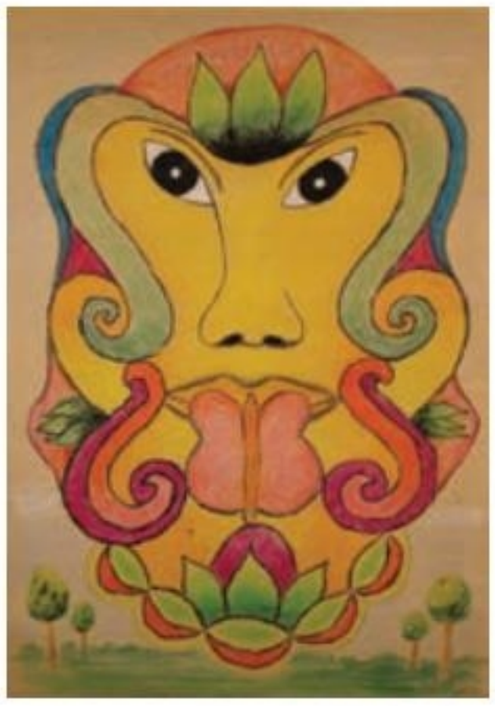

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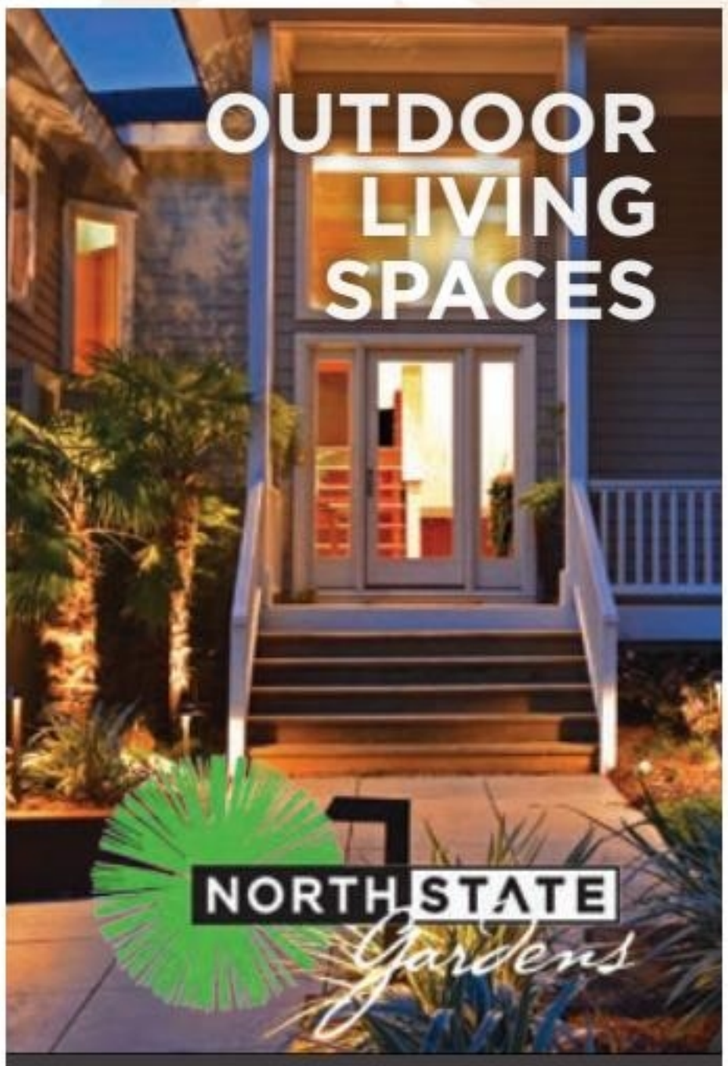

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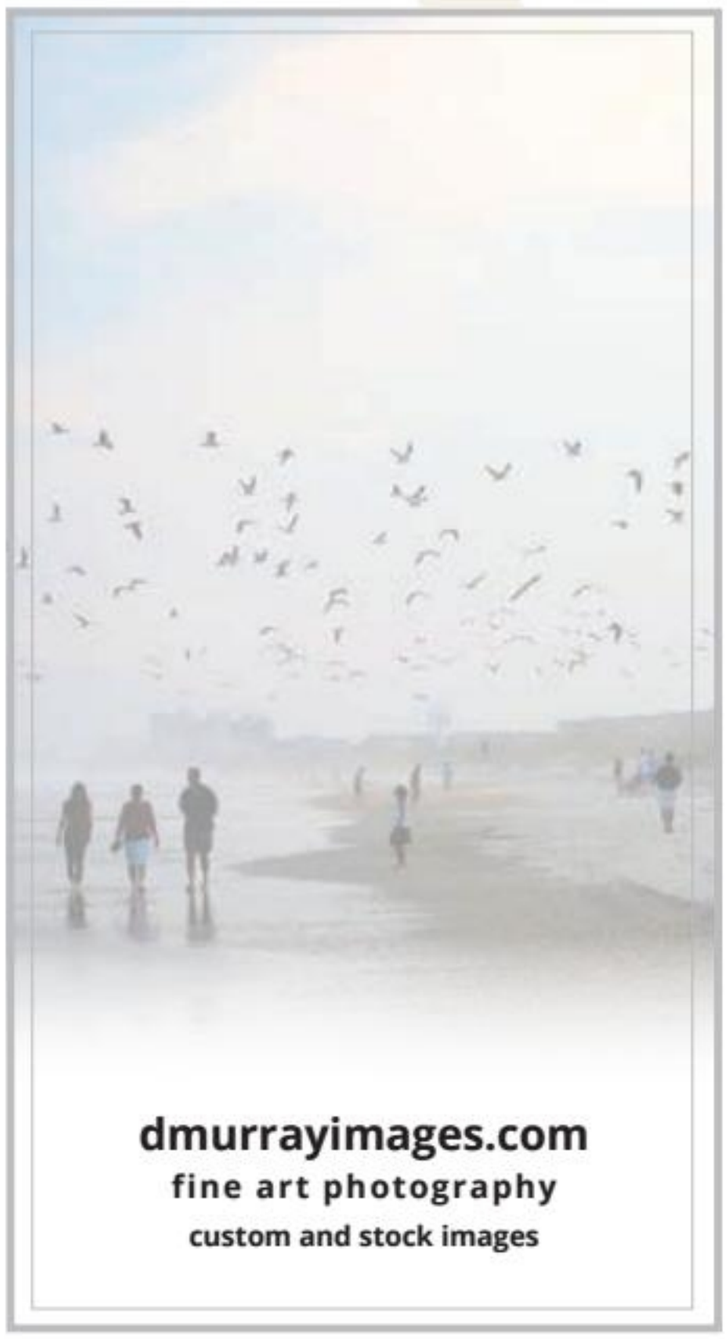

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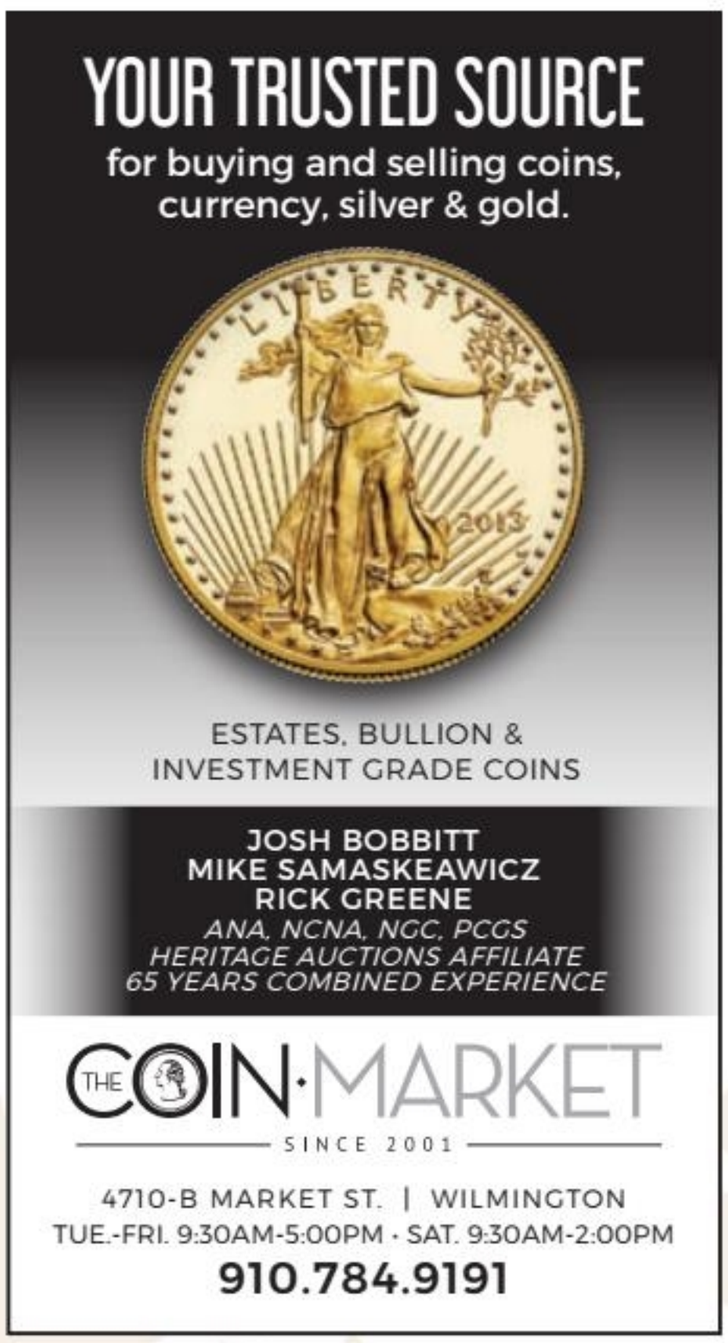
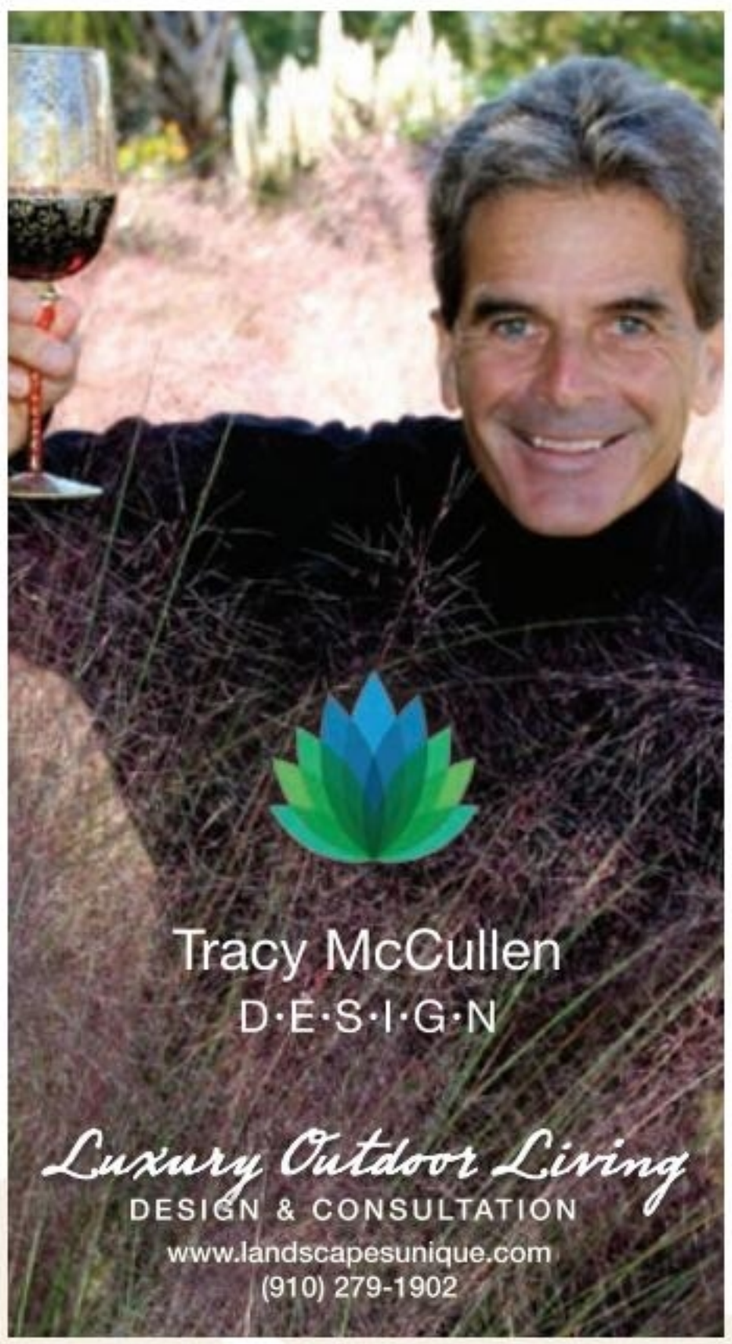
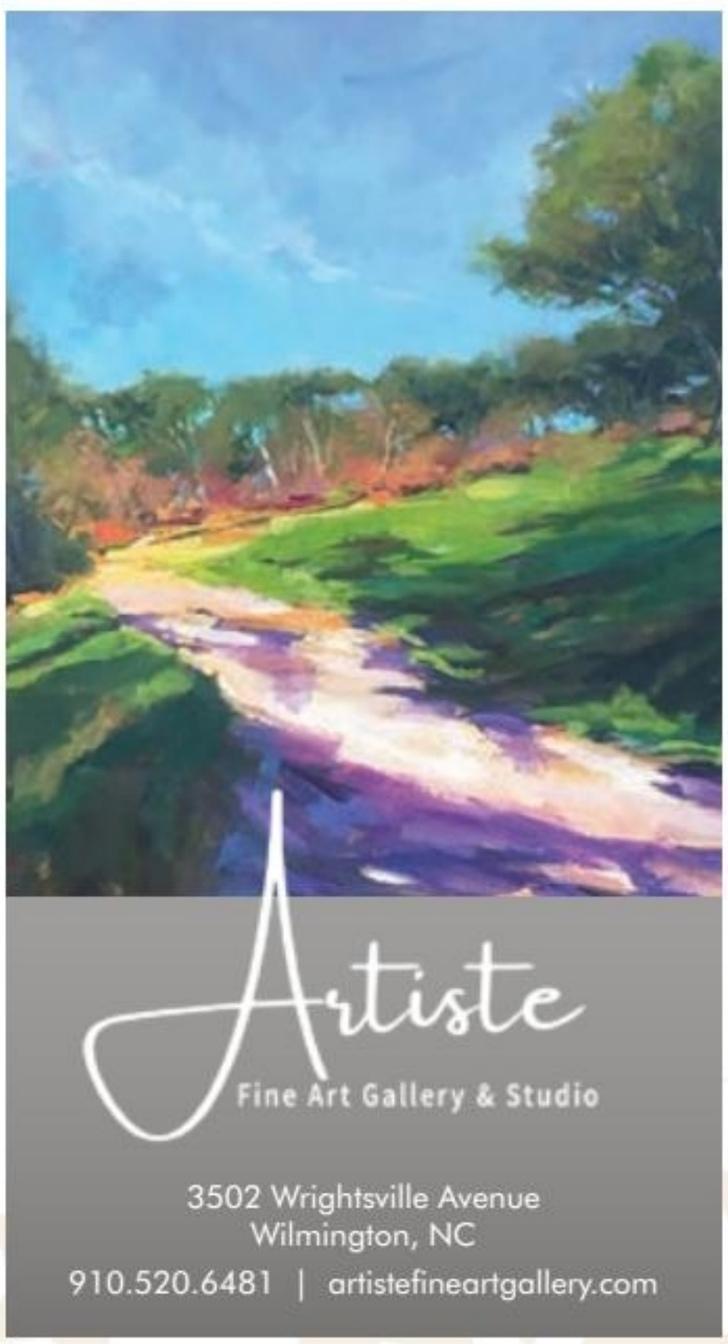
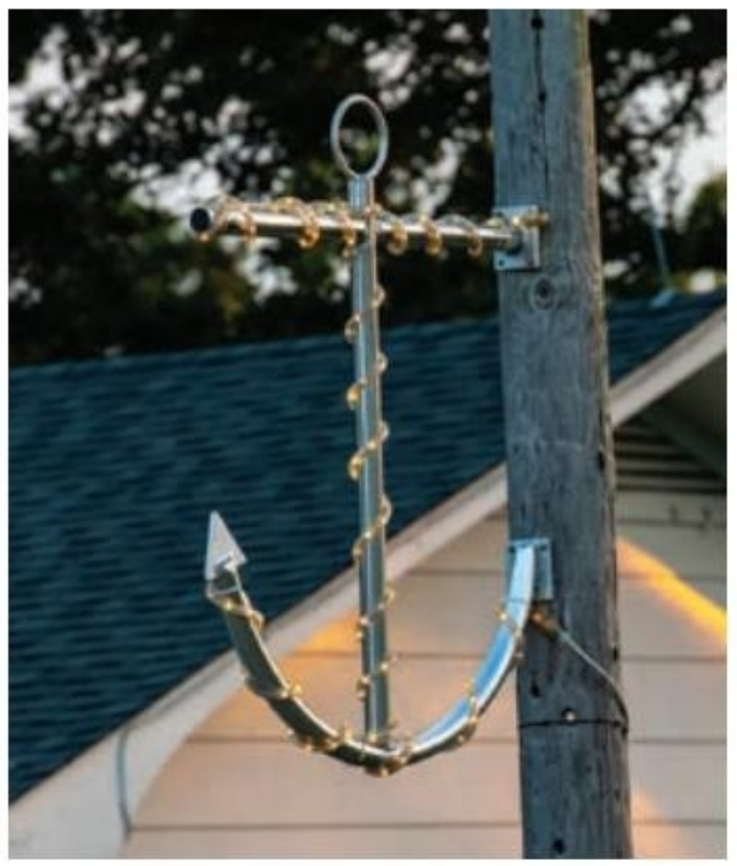






Bringing Back The Lights

After years of going dark and battling ocean storms, the Christmas lights of Harker's Island are back – "anchoring" a beloved community tradition



By Susan Ladd · Photographs by Cindy Burnham

On a pretty day, Richard Gillikin points out, an anchor doesn't do anything.

He would certainly know. A retired ferry captain, Gillikin now works on a contract basis as a tugboat captain, traveling up and down the East Coast. On a calm day, the anchor—well, it just lays there. "But the rougher it gets, the harder it digs in," he says. "That's us."

He's referring to the lifetime residents of Harker's Island, an often-overlooked corner of the North Carolina coast. It doesn't have long sandy beaches with crashing ocean waves, or a lighthouse or wild ponies like its sister destinations in Carteret County. Its only claims to tourism fame are the Cape Lookout National Seashore Visitor Center and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum. Flanked by the Core and Back sounds, it has long been a community of boat-builders, decoy carvers and commercial fishermen. Like residents of Wanchese and Ocracoke, Harker's Island residents still speak with the "Hoi Toider" accent — an Old English brogue that has survived years of isolation in these once-remote locations.

The Gillikin home is filled with tangible links to the fishing and hunting legacy for which the island has always been known: wooden needles, used to mend shrimp and gill nets. Decoys of every size — some collector's items worth thousands. Framed posters from every Decoy Festival since its inception. Now, those traditional livelihoods are disappearing. Economic hardship was compounded by a violent visit from Hurricane Florence last year. "We are trying to hold on to what we've got and keep Harker's Island the way it used to be," Gillikin says.

The anchor has become their symbol of resilience. Decorative anchors wrapped in lights are the centerpiece of Bring Back the Lights, an effort by a small group of community volunteers that includes Richard and Ellen Gillikin and Ellen's cousin Della Brooks, to re-create the spectacle they remember as children.

In those days, people came from all over to see the lights on Harker's Island. "This was the place to come Down East to see Christmas lights," Brooks says. "Everybody came and brought the young'uns." Cars would snake through the neighborhoods of the 2-mile island to see over-the-top yard and home displays. Ellen Gillikin recalls the time one resident put an ice-skating rink in the front yard.

Cab and Barbara Ramsey, founders of Jarrett Bay Boat Works, sponsored a decorating contest that was judged the Friday of the Core Sound Decoy Festival, which is traditionally held the first weekend in December. "There were so many lights on my end of the street that you didn't need electricity in the house," Brooks recalls. "People would spend $500 to win a $100 prize."

There would also be live Nativities at all the churches. Harker's Island has seven, Brooks adds, once the most per capita in the nation. The friendly rivalry brought the community together, and provided a respite from the cold, bleak winters.

The Christmas lights tradition thrived through the 1980s and 1990s, but major changes came to the island in the 2000s. The combination of higher taxes from a property revaluation and a surging real estate market led many families who had lived on the island for generations to sell and move inland. Then, in 2008, the real estate market and the general economy tanked, hitting the working-class residents particularly hard. Most islanders had made their living on the water for generations, passing charter services and shrimping operations to their children. But as the family-owned commercial fishing and shrimping businesses began to struggle, young people moved away to find work.

Slowly Going Dark

Between the census of 2000 and 2010, the population of Harker's Island fell by 20 percent, to 1,207 residents. Its median age at the last census was 51.7, compared to the state median of 38.7. And slowly, the island went dark. Many of the older people weren't able to put up the lights anymore. Many of the younger ones couldn't afford it. Many of the new residents — affectionately known as ding-batters by the island natives — only came to the island in summer. Those who moved to island to live — also known as dit-dots — didn't know about the tradition.

Today, Harker's Island may have more seasonal residents than permanent ones. Fifty-five percent of the phone bills for Harker's Island are mailed to addresses on the mainland, Richard Gillikin says. And

those who still make their living on the water probably make up less than 10 percent of the permanent population.

Ellen Gillikin and Della Brooks' great-grandfathers helped start the charter fishing industry on the island, but they both work on the mainland. Brooks is a sexual assault response coordinator for the Marine Corps at Cherry Point, and Ellen Gillikin is a registered nurse with the Carteret County Health Department.

One of the 10 percent who still make a living on the water is Andy Scott. The marks of a welder are burned onto his arms, and the history of the island is written on his face. At 59, he looks like a seafaring version of actor Sam Elliott. Deep blue eyes and a brushy white mustache provide startling relief in a face tanned and weathered by sun and wind and sea spray. Like many islanders, he quit school at 16 to work on the water. A shrimper by trade, he learned welding by necessity, since there's always something on a boat that needs fixing. He starts shrimping in June and continues until November, when he takes welding jobs.

Richard Gillikin, who designed the anchor, can weld, too. But to make the anchors, he turned to his friend. Scott laughs at the notion that he might be an artist, but the anchors weren't his first decorative project. He made starfish displays for the folks in Cedar Island, and dolphins for Otway. He made a steel shrimp boat silhouette for himself. "But nothing has done like these anchors have," Scott says.

Still, Bring Back the Lights wasn't exactly an overnight success. "I think we had eight to 10 people at the first meeting and two or three at the second meeting," Brooks says. "Everybody thought we were crazy."

In 2015, the first year, there were only five anchors on the whole island — most belonging to Brooks, the Gillikins and a few relatives. But people were impressed by the finished product, and the numbers grew in 2016.

The popularity of the anchors exploded in 2017. Tiffany and Randy Ramsey, the children of Cab and Barbara, revived the decorating contest, further fueling enthusiasm for the project. Scott says he's made 600 or so anchors since the first year, and shipped them as far as California. "And not a one blew down during the storm," he says proudly.

"The storm" was Hurricane Florence, which last September lashed the island for 36 hours, with torrential rains, flooding and hurricane-force winds. The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum was heavily damaged. Brooks' house was destroyed. Scott lost all his welding equipment. The memorial anchors he had made for Bring Back the Lights, stored in plastic boxes, were covered in marsh mud and saltwater. Anchors — even decorative ones — are made to withstand those elements. But the lights wrapped around them were destroyed.

"In 2018, we were in survival mode," Brooks says. "Everybody's property was torn up. We put up just enough lights for the kids."

But the members of Bring Back the Lights did what islanders always do: they dug in and started over. All the group's savings went to replace the lights they lost. While rebuilding and repairing their own homes, they've worked all year to raise money for Bring Back the Lights. They had a Christmas in July raffle, a community sing in August, and a barbecue luncheon at the Fall Festival in October. They eventually hope to build a 10-foot "Mama" anchor that can be displayed at a prominent location on the island, such as "the jib," a triangular plot of land that includes the Methodist Church in the business district.

They would also like to see an anchor in every yard. There are between 300 and 400 anchors on the island already, many lit year-round, and there are sure to be more by Christmas. Scott got 100 orders between January and July of this year. The committee has also replaced the blue lights for the memorial anchors, which are mounted on the dock of the island's small harbor.

"We'll have a good showing," Brooks says. "Already, people are driving over here and taking pictures again." More important, the project is bringing people back together in a community cause, Ellen Gillikin says. Some of the committee's strongest supporters are among its newest residents.

"We love 'em," Brooks says. "Everybody is welcome."

The islanders are tough to resist—quick to laugh, ribbing each other constantly, and finding humor even in the toughest challenges. You might have to sweet-talk them into being photographed, but the next minute they'll be striking a pose from *Charlie's Angels*. They'll send you home with a mess of fish if they've caught more than they need, or tell you the best place to find some already cooked.

It's a good place to drop anchor. Come on, and bring the young'uns.

Want to go? Harker's Island Christmas lights will be on display after Thanksgiving, with the winner of the decorating contest announced Dec. 7. The Core Sound Decoy Festival is Dec. 7-8. Events are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Dec. 7, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 8. Admission is $8 daily, children under 12 admitted free. Sunday is Youth Day with all children under 18 admitted free. Information: (252) 838-8818 or www.decoyguild.com.

Want an anchor? For $150, you can sponsor an anchor at the harbor to honor a loved one through the Bring Back the Lights Committee. Find them on Facebook at Bring Back the Lights to Harkers Island. You can buy or order an anchor for your home at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum Store, temporarily located in Morehead City at 806 Arendell. Small anchors are $95 and large ones are $135.

Susan Ladd is a writer, editor and educator with extensive journalism experience. A Tar Heel born and bred, she has spent a lifetime exploring North Carolina's many treasures. She lives in Greensboro.

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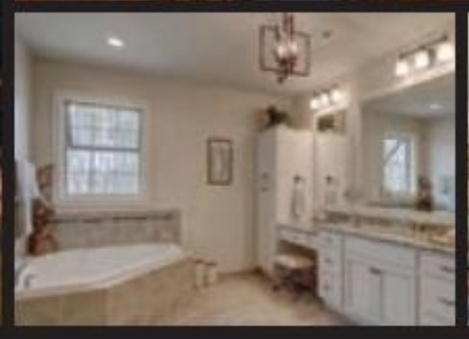

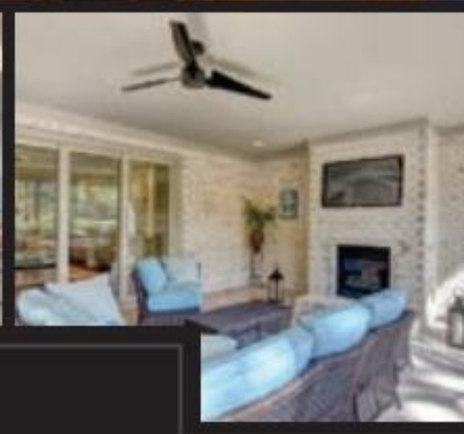

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The Crèche

Mama's philosophy on the Holy Nativity was "more is better"

By Nan Graham

The Christmas season was officially upon us when the stable and Nativity figures were unwrapped and carefully arranged on the sheet beneath the decorated cedar tree. The crèche was one instance where Mama's "more is better" policy did not serve her well. The stable held the papier-mâché Holy Family . . . and then some. Mama always liked to add a figure to the scene if she saw one at Woolworth's that she couldn't resist: another Wise Man with an especially exotic turban, or an appealing shepherd carrying his tiny metal crook in one hand while shielding his eyes with the other.

One year somehow there was an extra Joseph. Both men were solemn: one in gray robes, looking downward; the other in green, gazing at the middle distance Neither carried identification — no shepherd's crook or rich gift box of frankincense. Was the gray one looking at the manger, or was the green one side-glancing at Mary? One was an impostor, but which one? The final decision: The contender in gray was banished to the outer edge of the scene to join the flock of shepherds, not return to the inner stable tableau.

Once set up, the scene was startling: Wise Men, at least a baker's dozen of them, joined by standing and seated camels, approached from the right, bearing an assortment of gifts. A mob of shepherds, some with crooks, some without, a few with lambs slung over their shoulders (like tennis sweaters, I always thought), accompanied by sheep striding, grazing, and lambs *couchant*, all crowded in from the left and trailed by a German shepherd dog, despite its absence from St. Luke's account of the Holy Night.

On top of the stable: an angel, arms and wings outspread, a golden banner across its chest, a bemused expression on its face as it surveyed the sight below.

In the stable amid donkeys, cows, calves and goats were those whom the Wise Men and shepherds had come to see: Baby Jesus, Joseph and two Marys bending toward the baby.

One of the Marys had a poorly painted eye; the black paint ran down on her left cheek like ancient mascara. Mama had been unable to part with this second Mary, despite her more presentable replacement. So the extra woman still stood in the stable, quietly looking on. The scene was overpowering in the sheer numbers of the cast of characters. Mama made Cecil B. DeMille look like a piker.

It was a formidable vision of the biblical drama spread beneath that Christmas cedar, the real reason we have this season at all.

This childhood memory floods my soul every year when I unwrap those Nativity figures, especially the second Mary, who gathers with all the rest to see in their midst . . . the baby, the Christ Child.

Nan Graham is a regular Salt *contributor and has been a local NPR commentator since 1995.*

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Canada Goose

As days shorten, the flock grows

By Susan Campbell

That unmistakable honk overhead — we have just about all heard it lately: the tell-tale sign of fall. The aggregations ahead of winter are building. Family groups have joined and the birds are restless. As the days shorten and temperatures drop, the flocks will build. Winter is coming!

But why are there so many geese on the landscape? For two reasons: They are very good at reproducing; and the vast majority of the population statewide is now non-migratory.

The bottom line is that geese are very vigilant parents. Once a pair of Canadas has begun a family, they are a force to be reckoned with. A nest of four to seven eggs is laid in a deep nest of pine straw or grasses and lined with down plucked from the female's breast. The eggs will be incubated nonstop during daylight hours, protected by the sitting goose as well as the gander, who is always close by. Any intruder will be heralded by the relentless vocalizing of both parents. Upon approach, any would-be predator — four-legged or two-legged — will be attacked with a furor. And it is the wings that are the weapon; not the bill.

At dusk the eggs are covered with down to keep them well hidden and warm while the parents head out to feed under the cover of darkness. After some three weeks of incubation, the goslings emerge and follow their parents to water. At this point, the young geese have very good chances of survival. Although snapping turtles and bird hawks may be a threat while the young are small, the adults are very effective at protecting the newest members of the family. They are kept on the water the vast majority of the time where four-legged predators are unlikely to attack. Once the young of the year have attained full size, there are few threats to their survival. Unless they are attacked by another goose, few other animals are likely to be a problem. As a result, these birds can live a decade or more.

The long lives and reproductive potential of geese are causing problems all over the eastern United States, and our area is no exception. We have a large population of non-migratory individuals that spend the year on our lakes, golf courses and nearby farms. They are descendants of captive-bred geese that were released for hunting sometime in the early to mid-1900s. With abundant vegetation and few threats to their survival (interest in waterfowl hunting has been on the decline), Canada goose numbers continue to grow. We do have Northern birds that spend the winter here as well but the number of "locals" is significant: some 7:1 greater than their migratory brethren.

The truth of the matter is that the year-round birds are here to stay. Action taken by municipalities is, in some cases, controlling local population growth. There are methods that, with the appropriate permits and personnel, can help. Monitoring of flocks is an integral part of the process — and so goose control is a time-consuming endeavor. There is no easy fix. Introducing mute swans to bodies of water where geese have become unwanted is ineffective and actually will cause a new problem when the swans begin to reproduce.

But the sight and sound of skeins of Canada geese in the air is magical. I will always stop and look to the sky, no matter where I am, for these majestic, enduring creatures.

Susan would love to receive your wildlife sightings and photos. She can be contacted at susan@ncaves.com.

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The Aurora

Life in the
South suits me
just fine —
warm winters,
slow speech,
kudzu, and
iced tea.
But just once
I want to
stand in the
frigid dark,
wrapped in
a fur-lined
parka,
mukluks
on my feet,
scanning the
horizon for
a snow drift
that might morph
into a polar bear
and watch
the aurora borealis
explode across
the night sky —
green and red
lights
circling and waving,
twisting and weaving,
in a shimmering
dance.

– Karen Filipski

Thistle Among the Pines

Flora MacDonald and the Highland Scots of the Cape Fear

By Kimberly B. Sherman

Salty waves lapped the sides of the *Baliol* as the sloop crossed the bar to enter the Cape Fear River in the early fall of 1774. It had been an arduous journey from the western isles of Scotland to the colony of North Carolina. Anxious passengers breathed a small sigh of relief with their safe arrival. Perhaps in that moment Flora MacDonald looked over at her husband and smiled as she contemplated the reality of making a new home among the Highland Scots who had already settled in the colony's Cape Fear River Valley.

Several economic factors had propelled these Scots to cross the Atlantic: Their cattle were dying, the prices of their crops were faltering, and their landlords continued to raise their rents to astronomical levels. North Carolina offered the promise of land ownership. One prosperous immigrant deemed it "the best poor man's country." In their native Gaelic they exclaimed, "*Do I a dh'iarriudh an fhortain do North Carolina*" — "Going to seek a fortune in North Carolina."

Their stories were similar. Family members having already journeyed from Scotland to the piney woods along the Cape Fear River sent letters back to kin, beckoning them to join. By 1776, there were nearly 15,000 Highland Scots living in the Upper Cape Fear, making it the largest community of Scots in the British North American colonies.

One story, however, stands out. The *Baliol*'s most famous passenger, and best known of all the Scottish immigrants, was Flora MacDonald.

Born in 1722 on the island of South Uist in Scotland's Outer Hebrides, Flora MacDonald was a member of the MacDonald clan, the largest in all of Scotland. After her father died, Flora was raised and tutored in the homes of her kinswomen, first by Lady Clanranald and then Lady Margaret, wife of Alexander MacDonald of Sleat, on the Isle of Skye. She may have finished her education in the capital at Edinburgh. Years later, a popular English writer described Flora as "a woman of soft features, gentle manners, kind soul and elegant presence."

For all her education, Flora MacDonald is best remembered for helping Charles Edward Stuart, popularly known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, elude capture by British forces after the battle at Culloden in April 1746. The Stuart family and their Jacobite supporters had attempted to reclaim the Scottish throne in an ill-fated rebellion. As the story goes, Flora accompanied the prince, allegedly disguised as an Irish maid, in his escape by boat "over the sea to Skye." For her role in the young Stuart's escape, Flora spent a year imprisoned in London.

When she returned to Scotland in 1747, Flora did what most young women were expected to do: She married. Flora and her new husband, Allan, a distant kinsman from the MacDonald clan, set up house at Kingsburgh on the Isle of Skye, where Allan was a *factor*, or estate manager. Unfortunately, Allan MacDonald was more a "soldier and a gentleman" than a farmer and a businessman, falling further into debt with his landlord by unwisely purchasing a large herd of cattle he could not afford.

Like many other Scots, the MacDonalds witnessed a sharp rise in their rent over the years, while prices for their agricultural goods plummeted. In 1771, known as the "Black Spring," a severely cold and snowy winter had led to high mortality among cattle herds, particularly among those belonging to the MacDonalds. As a result, clan members began leaving Skye in droves for North Carolina.

The magnetism of North Carolina had long attracted settlers. As early as 1739, the first ship laden with Highland families had arrived at the Cape Fear. A steady stream of migrants continued, peaking in the latter 1750s and, again, in the early 1770s. Edinburgh's *Scots Magazine* reported the comings and goings of such voyages. Between April and

July 1770 alone, some 1,200 people left Scotland for North Carolina.

By 1774, Allan and Flora MacDonald also heard the clarion call of North Carolina. Flora wrote that they planned to "begin the world again, anew, in another Corner of it." When they made landfall at Wilmington with their youngest children, they found a bustling seaport inhabited by a wide variety of people from across the Atlantic world, including families like their own, merchants, shippers, planters, doctors, lawyers and enslaved African-Americans. Hearing of the MacDonalds' arrival, Wilmington's elite invited Flora and Allan to a ball reportedly held in their honor. Flora's reputation as the great Scottish heroine apparently preceded her.

The MacDonalds made their way westward, up the northwest Cape Fear River to the settlement of Cross Creek (near today's Fayetteville), where the majority of North Carolina's Highlanders had set up homes, businesses and plantations. They settled in Anson County on a farm they named Killiegray.

The possibilities seemed endless for the MacDonalds. And then came the Revolution.

American colonials had been debating their representation and British Parliament's oversight for nearly a decade, but concerns reached a fever pitch by 1775. Royal authority collapsed across North Carolina, and increasing tensions forced families like the MacDonalds to choose a side. Would they join the American cause or remain loyal to King George III? It may seem odd that many Highland Scots in North Carolina chose to support the very crown that had brutally crushed the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745 and wrought major social, economic and political changes to their homeland.

In the end, it was often a practical decision. Supporting British royal authority meant siding with a global superpower — not a rag-tag group of colonists who thought they knew better.

Leadership in London believed that the Highland Scots community at Cross Creek might prove useful in quieting colonial discontent. The British Army sent Scottish officers to North America in hopes of recruiting their support. Men like Brig. Gen. Donald MacDonald and Lt. Col. Donald MacLeod arrived in North Carolina in 1775 claiming they were visiting family in the Cape Fear, but with the true intention of creating a Scots Loyalist battalion. Earlier in the summer, Allan MacDonald traveled in disguise to see Royal Gov. Josiah Martin at Fort Johnston (in present-day Southport) in hopes of raising a Highland regiment for the Loyalist cause.

Martin and his supporters believed that clan leadership among the Highlanders and "enthusiastic love for the country from which they are descended" would still hold sway over the people. He estimated that some 3,000 Scottish Highlanders might descend the Cape Fear River to meet up with 20,000 British troops under Gen. William Howe, who would soon arrive at the mouth of the river. The governor's men sent out a letter calling for a rendezvous of Loyalists at Cross Creek in early February 1776. Word reached surrounding farms. Allan MacDonald and his son Alexander responded to the call.

About 1,100 men mustered into a makeshift militia, only 520 of which owned firearms. With the help of local raids and country merchants, they gathered additional weapons and mocked up their own British flag from scraps of textiles. News reached the Loyalists that Patriot forces had assembled to cut the Loyalists off from Wilmington

and the Lower Cape Fear. But no word had come from Martin on the arrival of the British army.

Legend tells us that Flora MacDonald's celebrity led her to give a rousing speech in Gaelic to the bedraggled Highlanders assembled at Cross Creek, urging them to fight for king and country. While the story is riveting, there is no evidence to suggest that Flora made such a passionate speech to her fellow countrymen. Fact or fiction, her story did not end there.

The Highlanders went on the offensive, leaving Campbelltown, North Carolina (today Fayetteville), on Feb. 20, 1776. They passed slowly through swampy terrain and approached a tributary of the Black River with caution. Patriot militia men under Richard Caswell had hastily doubled back to the eastern side of Widow Moore's Creek (in present day Pender County), where they dug in for the defensive.

In the cold hours before dawn on Feb. 27, 1776, the Scottish officers led their Loyalist militia toward the Patriot encampment. Some of the men under Alexander MacLean stumbled upon a bridge spanning the creek that had been disassembled and its girders greased with soap and tallow. Patriot sentries who spotted the Scots called for identifica-

tion, to which MacLean responded that he was a friend — a friend of the king. The sentries disappeared, and MacLean, thinking they might be fellow Loyalists, made a call in Gaelic. With no response, the rallying cry of "King George and broadswords!" went up, and the Loyalist militia plowed across the swamp.

The battle was short-lived. All of the men who managed to cross the tributary were mowed down by musket and cannonfire, including Donald McLeod, whose body was found only a few paces from the Patriot earthworks. In all, there were 50 Scots Loyalist casualties. Those who did not cross either hunkered down to return fire, or fled. At least 850 were captured in their retreat. Allan and Alexander MacDonald were among them.

The Loyalists' defeat at Moore's Creek effectively subdued organized resistance in North Carolina for the coming years. On April 12, 1776, the fourth North Carolina Provincial Congress met at Halifax, North Carolina, to consider the state of the government. They passed the Halifax Resolves, ordering that North Carolina delegates to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia would support American independence from Great Britain. By the end of the year, independence had been declared, and North Carolinians drafted a new state constitution. The province, meanwhile, plunged into civil war.

Those Scottish Loyalists captured by Caswell's forces after Moore's Creek were first hauled off to Halifax. The American forces immediately paroled the militia, but imprisoned Loyalist officers before sending them to Philadelphia — far from their homes and families. Allan's wife, Flora, was left behind:

"All this time in misery and sickness at home, being informed that her husband and friends were all killed or taken . . . Long oppressed, with straggling parties of plunderers from their Army, and night robbers, who more than once threatened her life wanting a confession, where her husband's money was."

At Killiegray, Flora faced potential violence. Those in service to her family ran off. Livestock was often stolen from rural farms, and homes burned. When Flora visited "other poor Gentlewomen" who were in similar circumstances, however, they treated her with contempt. They blamed her husband for being "the author of their misery, in raising the Highlanders." On one of these visits she even fell from her horse, breaking her right arm. For two years, Flora MacDonald wrote that she "remained in this deplorable condition" until the parole of her husband and the calling of a flag of truce for her family's passage from Wilmington to New York.

In the South, many Loyalists fled to British-occupied Charleston or Savannah and in the North, their Loyalist brethren found refuge in Boston, Philadelphia and New York City. By 1777, North Carolina required all men age 16 or older to take an oath of allegiance or leave the state. Additional legislation would banish many Scotsmen outright. With little choice, Scottish Loyalists had to decide between remaining in America, risking violence and retribution, or abandoning their homes for a different part of the British Empire.

In the meantime, Allan MacDonald had been released and left for New York City, where he assisted in raising a volunteer company of "Scotch Refugees from Carolina & Virginia." He later received a commission to join the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment in Nova Scotia.

Flora arrived in New York exhausted and weakened by illness and the anxieties of conflict, but she dutifully gathered her family and followed Allan to Nova Scotia. "I was obliged tho' tender to follow, and was very nigh death's door by a violent disorder, the Rough sea, and long passage, had brought on at last landing in Halifax," Flora lamented.

Upon arrival, the refugees set off on foot, trudging through forests and snow for the town of Windsor. "There we continued all winter and spring, covered with frost & snow, and almost starved with cold to death, it being one of the worst winters ever seen there," Flora recollected. It was a brutal change, and it would not be the end of the MacDonalds' misfortunes. Over the course of the following year, Flora met with several accidents — dislocating a wrist and an arm in multiple falls. "When I got the better of this misfortune, I fixed my thoughts on seeing my native Country," she wrote. She was, by this point, nearing 60.

Allan MacDonald obtained passage to Britain onboard the *Lord Dunmore* for Flora, their daughter and a few other young women. When the ship made its way up the Thames, she "received the melancholy news of (her) son Alexander's Death . . . being lost in his way home, having got leave, on account of his bad state of health" after being wounded in battle. Not long after, she heard of the loss of the *Villa de Paris*, on which her son Ranald was captain. The emotional and physical toll was great:

"Those melancholy strokes, by the death of my Children who, had they lived, with God's assistance, might now be my support in my declined old age brought on a violent fit of sickness, which confined me to my bed in London, for half a year, and would have brought me to my Grave."

Flora and her husband eventually resettled on the Isle of Skye, having come full circle from where they began more than a decade earlier. Their experience is representative of the opportunities and excitement that a new life in America held for Scottish emigrants. In turn, they had experienced the emotional and physical scarring of the Revolution, dislocation and loss of family.

In 1789, Flora concluded, "I may fairly say we both have suffered in our person, family, and Interest . . . without the smallest recompense."

Flora MacDonald's story has been told and retold over generations. Through it, we may better understand the opportunities that drew such a distinct body of Scots to early North Carolina and the varied experiences they had when making their new homes like thistles among the pines.

Kimberly B. Sherman received her Ph.D. in history from the University of St. Andrews and is currently a lecturer in history at Cape Fear Community College. Her forthcoming book is titled Intimate Worlds: Scottish Families in Early North Carolina and the Atlantic World. *The author would like to thank Pam Sherman, Chris E. Fonvielle Jr. and Jamie Hinrichs for their assistance on this article.*

Christmas, Sweet and Savory

The spirit of the holidays begins in the kitchen. Cheese biscuits, gingerbread and garnet-hued poached pears are three simple yet festive ways to celebrate

By Jane Lear

"The harried modern person looks to the winter holidays like someone slumped across a railroad track contemplating an oncoming train," mused food writer Laurie Colwin more than 25 years ago. Her words resonate today amid the ever-increasing hype, and I, for one, refuse to get caught up in the fray. When it comes to feeding people, for instance, I tend to rely on a small repertoire of things I can pull together without too much fuss and which will make folks feel cherished.

Cheese biscuits are at the top of my list. I'm using the word *biscuits* here in the British sense to mean crisp wafers, and it's still fairly common parlance in Colonial cities such as Wilmington. In fact, you'll see a recipe for these cayenne-spiced nibblies (often in the form of cheese straws) in every community and Junior League cookbook published south of the Mason-Dixon Line. They're standard fare at drinks parties, wedding receptions, and almost every other social occasion you can think of.

I'm very fond of how my mother served them, with soups and stews. Perhaps this was because the store-bought bread available at the time wasn't particularly flavorful (a basic baguette or sourdough loaf was unattainable), or perhaps she wanted a change from baking powder biscuits or cornbread; I don't know. But cheese biscuits are a great way to add a little savory richness, some finesse, to an everyday meal. One — just one, mind you — is also a civilized way to end an evening, along with a nightcap, or what some of us call a baby-doll.

And cheese biscuits make a fabulous present. Even though it's possible to buy every imaginable delicacy online these days, I think people are especially thrilled to open a gift that is home-made and almost profound in its

plainness. And that is not something sweet.

Southerners appreciate cheese biscuits because they know one can never have too big a stash. For expat Northerners, there is an element of surprise, and, once tasted, delight. "Where have these been all my life?" the recipients exclaim, reaching into the tin for another. And cheese biscuits have legs — that is, real staying power. Not only are they good keepers, but you don't get sick to death of looking at them, the way you do Christmas cookies. Face it: By early January, those cookies are so last year.

Cheese biscuits are so simple to make that anyone, even a person who suffers from an extreme case of F.O.F. (Fear of Flour), can throw them together without thinking about it. The secret is to buy the sharpest cheddar you can find, and add a little Parmigiano, "for sass," as the cookbook author Damon Lee Fowler likes to say.

Gingerbread is another standby in my holiday kitchen because it is easy to make and a hit with young and old alike. It can be enjoyed absolutely plain or dressed up with a glaze made from lemon juice and confectioners sugar, or with billows of whipped cream flavored with a little bourbon. It's the sort of thing you can serve guests at a fancy dinner party, and they will immediately feel like they're part of the family.

Whenever I make gingerbread, I am reminded of my Aunt Eloise — actually, a longtime friend of my mother's — who often visited us during the holidays. She would arrive in an immaculately maintained Buick and insist on carrying her own suitcase into our hall, setting it down with a little sigh. ("Always travel light, dear," she counseled, years before I ever went anywhere. "You may have to move fast.")

My brother and I couldn't wait to present ourselves before Aunt Eloise because we knew exactly what would happen. She would shake her head in amazement at how much we had grown, and hug us thoroughly before rummaging through a capacious handbag for two chocolate bars, wrapped in thin gold foil and glossy paper.

We had to open them very carefully, because Aunt Eloise wanted the foil back. Like my parents, she had grown up during the Great Depression, and never wasted a thing. She would smooth the sheets and tuck them away with a smile.

The days before Christmas were filled with tree-cutting and decoration, setting up the crèche, which had an expanded cast (my father trolled thrift shops and pawn shops looking, in particular, for the Baby Jesus — he couldn't bear the thought of one being adrift), and frantic gift wrapping.

And then, of course, there was the gingerbread. Dark, moist, and spicy, it was Aunt E.'s specialty. One year, she turned to face my brother and me in the kitchen. "I have always made gingerbread for you," she said, removing her apron and hitching it up, neat and workmanlike, around me. "Now, it's your turn." She switched on the oven and then got comfortable at the kitchen table. Mom made cups of tea for them both and buttered the pan.

My brother stirred the flour, baking soda and spices together. I plugged in the Sunbeam and managed to cream the butter and dark brown sugar, then beat in the eggs and cane syrup — preferred by all in our house to molasses. I stopped, startled, when the mixture looked curdled, but Aunt Eloise peered into the bowl and said, "Oh, it's fine! Just keep going and see what happens."

After beating in the flour mixture and a little hot water, everything miraculously came together. After my mother helped me pour the batter into the pan, she put it into the hot oven.

By the time the dishes were done, so was the gingerbread. Aunt Eloise patted several pockets — she had a magician's knack for misdirection — before unerringly settling on the right one, then fished out an envelope full of small gold stars, cut out of foil. They smelled very faintly of chocolate as we pressed them into the warm cake.

Now, when it comes to holiday food that is both easy and spectacular, things get a bit trickier. It pays to keep a file of these recipes, and if they happen to be gluten and/or dairy free, or not terribly bad for you, then so much the better. My go-to favorite is a recipe for scarlet poached pears developed by my former *Gourmet* colleague Paul Grimes, a brilliant food stylist with a painter's eye.

Because poached pears rarely look as good as they taste, Paul took a cue from a dessert at Le Chateaubriand, in Paris,

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES STEFIUK

which uses a beet to intensify the pears' hue. If you or yours don't happen to like beets, no worries: You can't taste the beet in the least, and the fresher and juicier it is, the deeper in color the fruit will become.

Beets have long been used as a dye for textiles and food, by the way. Before the advent of artificial colorants, they put the "red" in red velvet cake, for instance, and they turn Easter eggs a delicate mauve. The vegetable's saturated color, like that of bougainvillea, amaranth and the flowers of some cacti, comes from pigments called betalains (from *Beta vulgaris*, the Latin name of the common beet).

Poaching is among the gentlest of cooking techniques. Although it isn't complicated, you do want to be mindful of the heat. You don't want the liquid to vigorously boil — otherwise, whatever it is you're cooking will either break apart or toughen. A lower flame allows you greater control and precision. The end result — whether you are poaching chicken, say, or eggs or fruit — should possess the quality of *moelleux* (mwall-YEW) — a soft, velvety mouthfeel that is completely, captivatingly French.

If you are at all resistant to the idea of poached pears, you've likely been traumatized by one that threatened to skid across the table when pierced with a fork. This usually happens during a first date or dinner with the boss. But understanding *moelleux* — the pears should be so tender they practically melt in your mouth — is a gamechanger.

The key to success is very basic: You must cook the pears until they are done. Since the pears may be of slightly different sizes or at different stages of ripeness, be sure to test them all. When you insert a small skewer or paring knife, it should glide in but the flesh should still feel solid, not mushy.

Cheese biscuits, gingerbread and gorgeous poached pears have become three of my favorite traditions of the season, and here's hoping they find a place at your table as well. Happy holidays!

Gingerbread

I don't have Aunt Eloise's recipe, but this is a close approximation. It's based on the Tropical Gingerbread (minus the canned coconut) in *Charleston Receipts* — a standard reference for both Aunt E. and my mother — and the Old-Fashioned Gingerbread in the big yellow *Gourmet Cookbook*. When it comes to the cane syrup, you should know that this syrup made from ribbon cane is lighter and sweeter than molasses. Not only is it a versatile baking ingredient, it makes the ultimate condiment for pancakes, waffles, and hot biscuits. Cane syrup is available at supermarkets in the South; one of my favorite mail-order brands is Steen's (steens-syrup.com), from Louisiana.

1 stick unsalted butter, room temperature, plus extra to butter pan
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground allspice or cloves
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
2 large eggs
1/2 cup pure ribbon cane syrup
2/3 cup hot water

1. Preheat the oven to 350° and butter an 8- or 9-inch square baking pan. In one bowl stir together the flour, baking soda, spices and salt. In another bowl with an electric mixer beat together the butter and brown sugar at medium-high speed until nice and fluffy.

2. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, then beat in the cane syrup. At this point, the batter might look curdled, but, as Aunt Eloise would tell you, don't worry about it. Reduce the mixer speed to low and beat in the flour mixture, then the hot water. Continue to beat until the batter is smooth, a minute or so.

3. Pour the batter into the pan and bake in the middle of the oven until a wooden skewer inserted in the center of the gingerbread comes out perfectly clean, around 35 to 40 minutes. Put the pan on a wire rack to cool for a bit, then serve warm. The gingerbread is also a great keeper: the flavor deepens after a day or so, and if tightly wrapped, the cake stays moist.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES STEFIUK

Scarlet Poached Pears à la *Gourmet*

Serves 6

If your pears are very small or ripe (instead of firm-ripe), then set the kitchen timer for 20 minutes, say, instead of the 35 to 40 minutes specified below. And if the pears are indeed done more quickly, then transfer them to a bowl to cool, remove the bay leaf and cinnamon, and continue to simmer the poaching liquid until thickened and syrupy.

About the poaching wine: Orange Muscat is not the easiest dessert wine to find, but don't fret. Another muscat won't have the same alluring orange-apricot aroma, but it will still be delicious. Serve these beauties with a fork, for stabilizing the pear, and a dessert spoon, for scooping flesh and juice.

2 cups Orange Muscat such as Quady Winery's Essensia (from a 750-ml bottle)
1 medium red beet (1/4 pound), peeled and sliced
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1 cinnamon stick (about 2 inches in length)
1 bay leaf
3 small firm-ripe pears (about 1 pound total), such as Forelle or Bosc, peeled, halved lengthwise, and cored

1. Bring wine, beet, sugar, lemon juice, cinnamon stick, and bay leaf to a boil in a 1 1/2 - to 2-quart saucepan, stirring until sugar is dissolved.

2. Add pears and cover with a round of parchment paper to help them cook and color evenly. (So that they stay covered with liquid, place a small saucer on top of the parchment as they cook.) Reduce the heat and simmer, turning occasionally, until pears are tender and liquid is syrupy, 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer pears to a bowl. Discard cinnamon stick and bay leaf and pour syrup over pears. Cool completely in syrup, about 30 minutes. Poached pears can be made 1 day ahead and chilled in the syrup; the color will deepen the longer they stay in the syrup.

Cheese Biscuits

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon coarse salt
A generous pinch cayenne
1 stick unsalted butter, cut into pieces and softened to room temperature
6 ounces extra-sharp orange cheddar plus 2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano, coarsely grated (about 2 cups total) and at room temperature
Finely chopped crystallized ginger, for garnish

1. Whisk together the flour, salt and cayenne in a bowl until combined well. In another bowl, with a stand mixer, beat together butter and cheese until smooth. Beat dry ingredients into cheese mixture until smooth. The dough should be very malleable, like Play-Doh.

2. Roll the dough into a couple of logs for slicing. Wrap in waxed paper and chill until firm but not hard, about 30 minutes. (Dough keeps in the refrigerator 1 week. You can also freeze it, wrapped well; let it thaw at room temperature until pliable enough to work with.)

3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and cut each log into 1/8-inch rounds, giving the log a quarter turn after each slice so it stays round. Put a dab of the crystallized ginger on top of each biscuit, pressing gently so it adheres.

4. You can either bake the biscuits, one baking sheet at a time, in the middle of the oven, or set the racks in the upper and lower thirds, and switch the baking sheets halfway through. Depending on the size and thickness of your biscuits, they'll take anywhere from 16 to 18 minutes to bake. They are done when the bottoms are golden but the tops and sides are still pale. Let cool on a wire rack. Biscuits will stay fresh in an airtight tin for days and even improve in flavor.

Jane Lear, formerly of Gourmet *magazine and* Martha Stewart Living, *is the editor of* Feed Me, *a quarterly magazine for Long Island food lovers.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES STEFIUK

A Holiday Blessing,

to whom it may concern

By Virginia Holman

Whose idea was it to go caroling down our small country road? Most likely, it was suggested by my wise and kind aunt, who understood the need for children to be occupied with tasks to keep us out of trouble. My cousins, who were also my next-door neighbors, and I were thrilled and soon bored anytime that school let out for the winter holidays. So in late December, she'd send us down the lane to where the bayberries grew thick and wild to harvest the waxy fruit, which had the sharp aroma of pine mixed with rosemary. Field guides say that wax myrtles and bayberries are different names for the same plant, but our old bayberries in Virginia to this day yield larger berries and have more fragrant foliage than the wax myrtles of North Carolina; who knows why? My cousins and I would pick and talk for hours until our hands were sticky, our hair full of leaves.

After my aunt fixed us lunch, we'd be sent to gather more berries; by the third trip, with our buckets not even half full, we'd refuse to collect any more. My aunt would fill a speckled enameled pot with water and simmer the berries until her home smelled like Christmas, and her large windows overlooking the Chesapeake Bay clouded and dripped with steam. She'd hover over the pot with a spoon, and as the fragrant wax floated to the top, she would skim and skim. Later, in a double boiler, she'd re-melt the bayberry wax, add in a little paraffin, and we'd make small candles to give as gifts. Sometimes we'd dip a long weighted wick into the wax, and repeat until we had long tapers that looked more like stalagmites than anything you'd see in a store. The best candles were made by filling buckets with sand, making depressions with shells — conchs and clams — that we'd then fill with wax.

Making candles with my aunt and cousins remains one of my fondest childhood memories, perhaps because we held them while caroling, lighting them at each home as we wandered our country roads, gathering a few neighbor kids to join us, as we ran through the dark streets, knocked on doors, and then burst into song. As I recall, a couple of us had holiday songbooks from school, and the rest just went along for the ride. My most high-spirited cousin filled in any blanks in her memory with sentences that fit the rhythm and meter of the carol. "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," she'd sing in her clear alto, "to whom it may concern!" Our neighbors, many of whom were distant cousins (something that happens when families stay in one place for a few centuries), tolerated us with good cheer, offering cookies and cider as we blew out our candles, ran to the next house, and offered another imperfect, out-of-tune, yet heartfelt holiday song.

Soon after, my family left that small town behind. By the time I was in my mid- 20s, my mother, who had a long battle with schizophrenia, had been hospitalized and then placed in an assisted living home, where she was protected but not at all well. To cope, my sister and I had cultivated prickly, aloof exteriors and a barbed sense of humor meant to defend us against anything overly sentimental. Holidays were, as they are for many, a sus-

penseful tightrope walk between a painful past and a hopeful future. My father had long held dual roles in our lives as provider and nurturer, and it was he who kept hope and faith going in our household. Because we could not seem to settle on a particular church — our family was Episcopalian and Baptist — my father took us to First Unitarian, a welcoming font of acceptance in our conservative Virginia community.

At the time, First Unitarian was unlike any other church in it that accepted not only Christians, but also Jews, Muslims, agnostics and even — gasp — atheists. For couples whose families held different faiths, like the Israeli woman who was married to a Palestinian man, having a single house of worship that accepted each person was a rare and wonderful thing. If our church sounds like it was exotic or motley, it really wasn't. It was just a lovely, welcoming group of people from many backgrounds, all of whom wanted to worship within a warm community, and it mattered little if everyone believed the same things. People came together to discuss their backgrounds and their struggles with faith in an earnest and thoughtful way. No matter what the individual beliefs, love was always the bottom line.

Even so, the holidays could be tricky. Our minister labored each year in an effort to fully include each member's beliefs and traditions in holiday celebrations. This was admirable, though oftentimes hard to accomplish, at no time more than during our Christmas or solstice celebration, in which we sang modified carols, Hanukkah songs, and on one baffling occasion a slightly reworded version of The Beatles' tune "Let it Be," which replaced the words "Mother Mary" with the words "Holiday Spirits"). This was meant to evoke the spirit of the season, but the modification, ("When I find myself in times of trouble, holiday spirits come to me...") wound up making Holiday Spirits sound vaguely Dickensian.

By the time my sister was in college, my family had gone from being active members of the church to only attending now and again. At the end of a particularly challenging year for our family, my young husband and I went home for Christmas. My sister and I looked forward to the warm camaraderie of the Christmas Eve service, but we were too cool or guarded to really admit it. We were too busy making each other laugh in anticipation of the music portion, and we huddled in a corner of my father's house after Christmas Eve dinner, making up silly Christmas carol modifications and making each other giggle. My father's fiancée, a truly lovely woman, was joining us for the first time at our holiday service — though she and my father had dated for several years, my father was still working hard at impressing her — and we weren't making it easy on him with our antics.

We almost skipped the church service that year because my father was so annoyed with us, but my sister and I rallied and pleaded and the five of us bundled up and headed out into the cold night. The music portion was exactly as my sister and I remembered, and our future stepmother looked a bit amused and perplexed at the modified lyrics. Perhaps she'd thought we had been exaggerating. Each year at the end of the evening, there was a welcoming ceremony for the new children in the congregation, a lovely moment when the congregation lit one another's candles and held each other in the light of love. My father, still grumpy with our earlier behavior, said with a wink, "It's time for the blessing of the animals."

That year, one family requested to sing a song to their newest family member, a baby they had just adopted. The family gathered together at the altar — a father, a mother carrying the baby, and a little boy. The father was a bit shy, and he said into the microphone something along the lines of, "We weren't sure what song to sing, so we wrote this song." Then, without musical accompaniment, the family sang in wavering voices a simple sing-song tune as they welcomed their newest member.

"Baby Noah, welcome home
We love you, we like you.
Mama loves you, Daddy loves you
Jake does too."

I started trembling and weeping, overcome with emotion. I looked at my father and sister and husband and future stepmother; they were weeping too at this moment of unexpected beauty and profound love.

Perhaps the people gathered in our Unitarian church weren't singing the songs the way they were written, but we were singing together. On that holy night, one of many in a holy season, we listened to a family sing a song wholly their own. As they welcomed a new child into their family, we were awed to be invited to witness such an intimate tenderness, and to see love made manifest, in the truest spirit of the season.

Author and creative writing instructor Virginia Holman lives and writes in Carolina Beach.

A Stylish Survivor's Story

Despite the ravages of fire and Florence, The Verandas still holds pride of place in the historic district

By William Irvine

Photographs By Andrew Sherman

Chuck Pennington and his partner, Dennis Madsen, had a dilemma: They were looking for a new place to call home and open a bed-and-breakfast. It was the mid-1990s. After visiting various scenic and recommended towns from Ogunquit, Maine, to Asheville, they were still not finding what they wanted. But a friend had one last suggestion: "We had friends who grew up in Wilmington," says Pennington. "They told us that this sleepy little city was going to explode. There was an intense movie business, a major medical center, G.E., and a beautiful downtown historic district that looked promising."

The Beery House had been through tough times. Benjamin Washington Beery (1822-1889) was a ship builder and proprietor of Berry Brothers Shipyard, which occupied a large swath of Eagles' Island opposite Castle Street. Informally known as the Confederate Navy Yard, thanks to its lucrative contracts with the Confederate government, it was here that Jefferson Davis paid a visit to inspect the ironclad gunboat *North Carolina*, one of the shipyard's several important commissions. Beery owned a plantation outside Wilmington and a farm in Laurinburg, but his main house was in town — a large vented-and-bracketed Italianate mansion at 212 Nun Street, completed in 1854. Its eight bedrooms provided plenty of room for his wife, servants and three children. From its elegant cupola, Beery could keep watch on his shipyard and the river traffic on the Cape Fear.

But the years after the Civil War saw a reversal of fortune. Benjamin Beery set fire to his own shipyard as the Yankees approached Wilmington. The house was used as a medical hospital during the war. After the city fell to the Union Army, Beery was taken into custody. Eventually, he was forced to sell 212 Nun Street to pay his many creditors. The Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy occupied the house in 1869-70, creating a convent and school that was the forerunner to St. Mary's (hence Nun Street), making it the first Catholic school in North Carolina.

After a series of prominent owners, among them William Canaday, sergeant-at-arms of the U.S. Senate, by the 1920s the house had fallen into decline, mortgaged many times over and finally listed in city records as abandoned in 1947.

By 1992 the house was in its sixth or seventh chapter as a boarding house, its owners renting rooms by the night for $5. As many as eight people shared rooms, sleeping on cots. "They were rooms with no board and bathrooms down the hall," says Pennington. One evening, a tenant was hand-washing some clothes and left them on a space heater to dry, which started a fire. It burned uninterrupted for almost eight hours.

The house had been empty for three years when Pennington and Madsen first saw it in 1995. "It was a burned-out shell," says Pennington. Windows were broken and covered in torn plastic, flapping in the wind; it was surrounded by a chain-link fence. But, he says, "I thought it was the most beautiful house I had ever seen." They had to have it.

"The bank had no faith in us," says Pennington, who notes that the contract for sale fell through on three different occasions. "It's hard to believe now, but this was considered a dangerous neighborhood in 1995. There were seven empty houses on the block." But they finally were approved. It was time for the hard work to begin.

When they finally took possession, their reward was a rabbit warren of rooms full of ruined and burnt furniture. "It was a disaster," says Pennington. "Vagrants had stripped the house down to the switch plates."

One of the grand parlor rooms on the first floor had been converted to an efficiency apartment with a stove. It took almost two years — till Valentine's Day 1997 — before The Verandas was open to the public. Says Pennington: "We opened with four guest rooms and eventually expanded to the present-day eight." And the final result was a showplace, an authentic re-creation of the Victorian splendor of the original. Most importantly, it created an engine for gentrification that defines the neighborhood today. And so it thrived for many years, winning every hospitality honor, including the coveted AAA 4-Diamond Award. Over the years, the surrounding neighborhood improved. The Riverwalk was built. Downtown was booming...

And then came a visitor named Florence.

As the hurricane approached, Pennington made the decision to stay in the house in case something bad happened. "I was in the house and heard the tornado," he says. "The front doors blew open and there was a crash. I went downstairs and saw that the ceiling in the dining room had water cascading through the chandelier."

A huge 150-year-old elm tree in the back of the house had toppled, causing almost insurmountable damage: The falling tree broke the terrace, the fence and the neighbor's roof. And then there were the roots: "The tree roots broke the brick stairs, 50 feet of retaining wall, both water lines, the sewage system, the underground electrical system, and about $10,000 worth of landscaping," says Pennington. One of the 6-by-8-foot chimneys was blown into the house with such force that the legs of a bed in one of the guest rooms went though the floor. The chimney created an 8-by-20-foot hole in the ceiling; rain came pouring through the house for the next 10 days.

When it was all over, pretty much everything had to be replaced. New insulation. All furniture repaired and reupholstered. New terrace, landscaping, roof trusses, chimney. Plumbing, electrical, fire systems and alarms. "And at the end, we had 45 fans and 60 dehumidifiers running for six weeks," Pennington gestures, sweeping his arm across the perfectly restored living and dining room parlor. "None of this could have happened without my general contractor, Steve Ventner, who oversaw the entire project."

And despite fires, hurricanes and tornadoes, and due to the unwavering vision of its owners, the house has survived, and thrived: "It was a lot of work and has taken 14 months so far. But I am real pleased with how it turned out."

William Irvine is the senior editor of Salt. *His latest book,* Do Geese See God? A Palindrome Anthology, *is available on Amazon.*

ALMANAC

December

By Ash Alder

December is a treasure trove of fragrance and memory.

One whiff of cinnamon, for instance, and I'm back in Grammy's kitchen, watching the birds through the sunny window as cinnamon sticks simmer on the stovetop.

"Is that pesky critter back?" she asks, squinting as she scans the front yard, feeders swinging like pendulums.

"Oh, for Pete's sake," she says, watching a plump gray squirrel balance between a crape myrtle branch and a hanging tray like some kind of clumsy acrobat. "Hand me my squirt gun, would you?"

Incense fumes take me back further still: to the children's Nativity play at Catholic Mass, frankincense and myrrh wafting up toward the vaulted ceiling as toddlers slink from laps to kneelers, climb from kneelers to creaky wooden pews. As the organist fires up "Joy to the World," all I can see is Christmas dinner (sliced ham, soft rolls, green beans, potato gratin), a smorgasbord of cookies, and the ocean of neatly wrapped presents to follow.

And then — yes, there it is — the scent of Fraser fir.

I must have been 11 when my folks brought home that first real tree. Until that day, unfurling and shaping the plastic branches of our tired yet faithful artificial tree was, for me, the highlight of the holidays. But once the entire house smelled like a lush woodland forest, I was forever transformed. Although I had neither the words nor the reference for it then, now I might compare the experience to some kind of awakening — like falling in love. All I knew for sure was this: If I had any say in the matter, my days of plastic trees were done.

Hot chocolate, citrus, fire, peppermint bark, homemade pie . . .

This aromatic month, no telling what delightful memories might come to light.

December Sky Watch

This month, love is in the night sky. On Saturday, Dec. 28, two days after an annular solar eclipse not visible from here (try Saudi Arabia, southern India or parts of Indonesia), a crescent moon and Venus will "kiss" in the southwestern horizon at 8:33 p.m. *National Geographic* named it one of the top sky-watching events of 2019. Take their cue. Mistletoe is everywhere. You know what to do.

Winterberry Magic

Want to draw more birds to your backyard this and future winters? Just add berries. Audubon North Carolina's Bird Friendly Communities Initiative dubbed the winterberry "irresistible" to wood thrushes, gray catbirds, Eastern bluebirds, American robins, cedar waxwings and woodpeckers. And this native plant just so happens to thrive in the mountains, piedmont and coastal plain.

Like its iconic cousin the American holly, winterberry plants are either male or female. This means you'll need to plant at least two-for-one to produce fruit. The winterberry flowers from April to June, and while it loses its leaves in the autumn (unlike the holly), all the better for witnessing its colorful berries, which it bears from August through December. You'll get a better glimpse of the visiting birds that way, too.

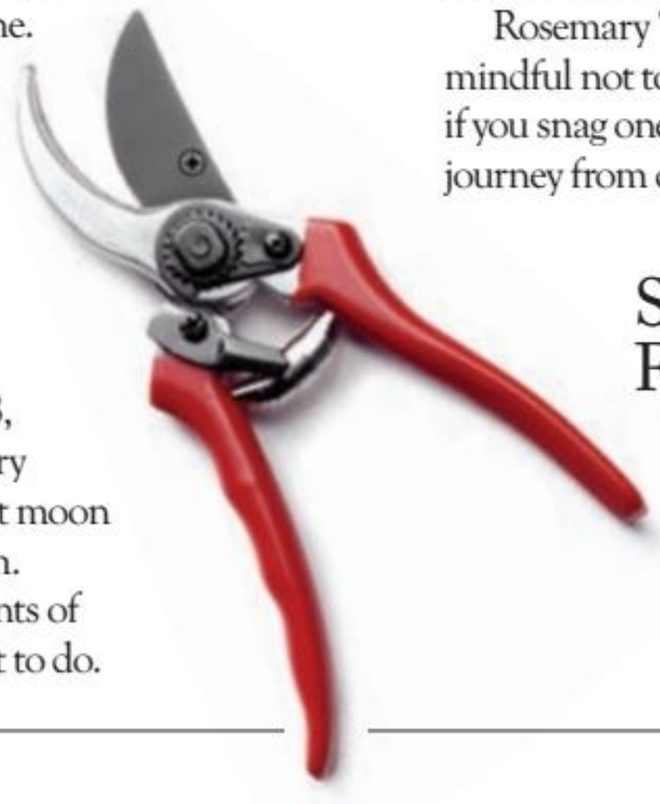
Other plants with brilliant berries: beautyberry, deciduous hollies, Washington hawthorn.

I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December,
A magical thing,
And sweet to remember:
"We are nearer to spring
Than we were in September."
— Oliver Herford, "Hope," 1914

The Real Thing

Spruce, pine or fir, evergreen trees have long been used to celebrate winter festivals — pagan, Christian or otherwise. If you're considering a living tree for the house and landscape this year, you'll want to keep it outside for as long as possible (read: It won't be happy indoors for more than 14 days). Although their needles aren't as soft as the iconic fir, white pines thrive in North Carolina.

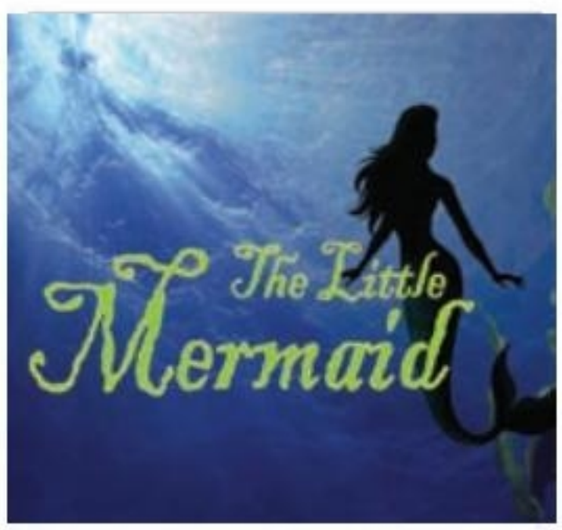
Rosemary "trees" are another great option. Just be mindful not to "shock" them with too-cold temperatures if you snag one from a local nursery. The shorter their journey from cozy greenhouse to warm home, the better.



Stocking Stuffers for Your Favorite Gardener

- Snapdragon seeds
- Pruning shears
- Natural twine
- Gardeners hand cream
- *Winter Poems*, by Barbara Rogasky

Arts Calendar



Ballet For Young Audiences: *The Little Mermaid*

12/5

14th Annual Holiday Train Expo

12/7-8

Carolina Beach State Park Half Marathon and 5K

12/28

To add a calendar event, please contact calendar@saltmagazinenc.com. Events must be submitted by the first of the month, one month prior to the event.

12/1-1/2 Cape Fear Festival of Trees

9 a.m.-5 p.m. The NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher is transformed into an enchanted forest of holiday trees decorated by businesses, organizations, and individual artists. Proceeds benefit the Lower Cape Fear Hospice. Tickets: $10-$12. NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, 900 Loggerhead Road, Kure Beach. Info: (910) 457-6942 or ncaquariums.org.

12/1-24 Covenant Moravian/Dewey's Pop-Up Store

Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday, noon-6 p.m. The best place in town to stock up on Moravian sugar cake, cookies, stars, and other Christmas items. The store is sponsored by Covenant Moravian Church. Mayfaire Town Center, 890 Town Center Drive (next to Regal Mayfaire Cinema in Santa's Workshop). For info: (910) 799-9256 or covenantmoravianwilmington@gmail.com.

12/3 Wilmington Choral Society

7 p.m. The Wilmington Choral Society Concert performs "Songs of Disney." Tickets: $8-$20. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

12/5 Jazz at the Cam

6:30-8 p.m. Jazz at the Cam features a performance by pianist Paolo Andre Gualdi. Tickets: $12-$25. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: cameronartmuseum.org.

12/5 Ballet For Young Audiences: *The Little Mermaid*

7 p.m. Ballet for Young Audiences presents *The Little Mermaid*, based on the classic story by Hans Christian Andersen. Tickets: $20-$50. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/5-6 Choir of St. Paul's Concert

7:30 p.m. The Choir of St. Paul's Concert will feature the North Carolina Baroque Orchestra with a Christmas program including Handel's *Messiah*. Tickets: $25. St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 16 North 16th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 762-4578 or spechurch.com.

12/5-6 Handel's *Messiah* : Christmas Portion

7 p.m. The Festival Chorus and soloists perform the Christmas portion of Handel's *Messiah*. Admission: Free. Tickets available beginning Nov. 11 at the church. St. Andrews Covenant Presbyterian Church, 1416 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 762-9693 or sacpc.org.

12/6 Island of Lights Christmas Parade

7:30 p.m. This annual parade features holiday floats, bands and Santa Claus. Parade route runs from Atlanta Avenue down Lake Park Blvd. to Federal Point Plaza. Admission: Free. Atlanta Avenue and South Lake Park Boulevard, Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-5507 or pleasureislandoflights.com.

12/6-8, 13-15 A Merry Little Christmas Festival

Friday, 5-8 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Among this year's offerings are arts and crafts vendors, a bonfire, outdoors screening of Christmas classics (including *The Polar Express*) and much more. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 U.S. 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 686-9518 or poplargrove.org.

12/6-8 Holiday Flea at BAC

Friday, 4-9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sunday, 12-6 p.m. The Brooklyn Arts Center's Holiday Flea features more than 50 vendors of vintage and retro objects, plus food trucks and a cash bar. Tickets: $5. Kids under 12 are free. Brooklyn Arts Center, 516 North Fourth St., Wilmington. Info: brooklynartsnc.com.

12/6-7 Ballet for Young Audiences: *The Nutcracker*

Friday, 4 and 7 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. Ballet for Young Audiences presents Tchaikovsky's classic Christmas story, *The Nutcracker*. Tickets: $20. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/6-22 Enchanted Airlie

5-7 p.m.; 7-9 p.m. Come celebrate the season with a self-guided tour of the gardens, featuring holiday lights and displays. Local vendors will serve hot chocolate, coffee, popcorn and other holiday treats. Tickets (per carload) are only sold in advance. Admission: $30-$55. Airlie Gardens, 300 Airlie Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-7700 or airliegardens.org.

12/7 Christmas By the Sea Parade

2 p.m. This year's parade features holiday floats from community businesses and organizations and a float-decorating contest. The parade route goes from Oak Island Town Hall down Oak Island Drive to McGlamery Street. Admission: Free. Oak Island Town Hall, 4601

East Oak Island Drive, Oak Island. Info: (910) 457-6964 or southport-oakisland.com.

12/7 Island of Lights: Christmas Flotilla

6 p.m. The Island of Lights Christmas Flotilla features a parade of fishing boats and pleasure crafts decorated in holiday lights. The boats follow a route from Snow's Cut to the Carolina Beach Boat Basin and back. Admission: Free. Carolina Beach Marina, 100 Carl Winner Ave., Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-5507 or pleasureislandoflights.com.

12/7 Dashing Thru the Glow 5K and 1-Mile Run

5 p.m.-6:30 p.m. Runners can have their picture taken with Santa and will receive Christmas ornaments after completing the run. A benefit for Toys for Tots. Admission: $29-$40. Marina Village, 109 Pier Master Point, Wilmington. Info: its-go-time.com/riverlights-dashing-thru-the-glow.

12/7 Holiday Open House

10 a.m.-4 p.m. A variety of holiday entertainment, including live music performances, refreshments, and decorations. Admission: Free. Fort Fisher State Historic Site, 1610 Fort Fisher Blvd. South, Kure Beach. Info: (910) 251-7240 or fisher@ncmail.net.

12/7 UNCW Men's Basketball

2 p.m. The UNCW men's basketball team plays Charlotte. Tickets: $10-$18. Trask Coliseum, 601 S. College Road, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3233 or uncwsports.com.

12/7 Candle Tea

9 a.m.-3 p.m. This annual event features music, stories and an array of Moravian baked treats and crafts available for purchase. Admission: Free. Covenant Moravian Church, 4126 S. College Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 799-9256 or covenantmoravian.org.

12/7-8 14th Annual Holiday Train Expo

1 p.m.-6 p.m. The Cape Fear Model Railroad Society hosts its 14th annual Holiday Train Expo. Admission: $4-$6. Independence Mall, 3500 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 231-8567 or capefearmodelrailroadsociety.com.

12/7-8 A Carolina Nutcracker

Saturday, 7 p.m.; Sunday, 3 p.m. Tchaikovsky's classic holiday ballet, *The Nutcracker*, is set in the Bellamy Mansion of 1865. The City Ballet is accompanied by a 50-piece orchestra. Tickets: $20-$40. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

12/7-8 47th Annual Old Wilmington by Candlelight Tour

Saturday, 4-8 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society's annual candlelight tour takes you inside private homes and churches in the Historic District. Refreshments are served. Tickets: $10-$40. Latimer House Museum, 126 S. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 762-0492 or lcfhs.org.

12/8 Cape Fear Chorale Concert

7 p.m. The Cape Fear Chorale presents "Sounds of the Season," a concert of Christmas music. Admission: Free. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515

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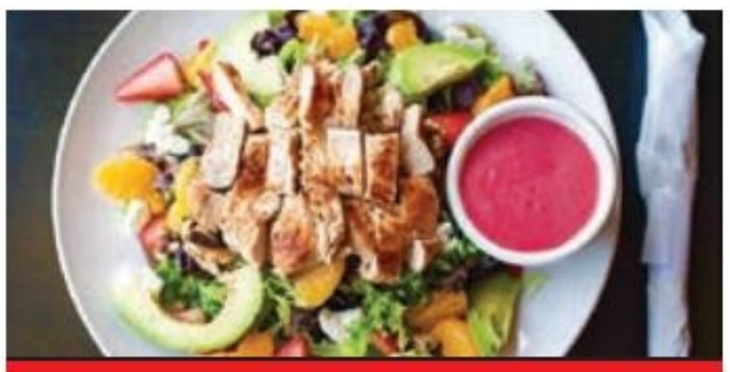

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12/8 An 18th-Century Christmas

1 p.m.-5:30 p.m. Costumed interpreters show how the American colonists celebrated Christmas. Tours of St. Philips Anglican Church will be offered and there will be refreshments, games and crafts. Candlelight service in the church runs from 5-5:30 p.m. Admission: $5. Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site, 8884 St. Philip's Road SE, Winnabow. Info: (910) 371-6613 or nchistoricsites.org.

12/8 2nd Annual Holiday Bonanza

1 p.m.-6 p.m. This holiday fair features 40 vendors, a bake sale, and various door prizes. Moose Lodge, 4610 Carolina Beach Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 392-4200 or lodge343@gmail.com.

12/8-9 Jingle Belles Holiday Tea Party

2 p.m.-4 p.m. 'Tis the season for high tea at the Bellamy, with scones, tea sandwiches, desserts and a champagne toast. Participants also receive a free tour of the Bellamy Mansion. Tickets: $50. Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-3700 or info@bellamymansion.org.

12/10 Over Fifties Dance Club December Dance

7:30-10 p.m. Come twist and waltz the night away at the monthly Over Fifties Dance Club dance. A variety of DJs will play all kinds of music — ballroom, Latin, shag, rock 'n' roll, country. Admission: $8. New Hanover Senior Resource Center, 2222 S. College Road, Wilmington. For info: (910) 620-8423 or overfiftiesdanceclub.com.

12/10-11 The Illusionists: Magic of the Holidays

7:30 p.m. The Illusionists is a revue of world-famous practitioners who will share incredible feats of magic. Admission: $38-$92. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

12/12-15 *A Christmas Carol*

7:30 p.m.; Sunday performance at 3 p.m. The Theatre Exchange's adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, set in Depression-era St. Louis. With executive director Tony Rivenbark at Ebenezer Scrooge. Tickets: $28. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/13 Holiday Concert With Bella Nova Strings

7 p.m.-9 p.m. Admission: $10. Leland Cultural Arts Center, 1212 Magnolia Village Way, Leland. Info: (910) 385-9891 or lcac@townofleland.com.

12/13-22 *Elf: The Musical*

7:30 p.m; Sun. performance at 3 p.m. Thalian Association Community Theatre presents their production of *Elf: The Musical*. Tickets: $32. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/13-14 Christmas Train and Light Spectacular

6:30 p.m.-8 p.m. The Christmas Train & Light Spectacular features holiday-themed trains and exhibits, a visit from Santa and cider and cookies. Admission: $5. Wilmington Railroad Museum, 505 Nutt St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 763-2634 or wrrm.org.

12/14 Island of Lights: Tour of Homes

5 p.m.-9 p.m. A self-guided tour of Pleasure Island homes decorated for the holidays. Various venues, Carolina Beach and Kure Beach. Info: (910) 458-5507 or pleasure-islandoflights.com/tour-of-homes.

12/14 Christmas Stroll Through the Past

4:30-7:30 p.m. A candlelight walking tour of the Bellamy Mansion Museum, the Burgwin-Wright House, and St. James Episcopal Church. Live music and holiday refreshments will be offered. Tickets: $10-$20. Various venues in the Historic District. Info: (910) 251-3700 or bellamymansion.org.

12/14 Jingle Bell Run 5K

9 a.m. The Wrightsville Beach Museum's 5K Jingle Bell Run encourages runners to dress in holiday finery (Santa, snowmen and more). Prizes will be awarded for best costumes and all proceeds benefit the museum. Admission: $15-$40. Wrightsville Beach Museum, 303 W. Salisbury St., Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-2569 or its-go-time.com/jingle-bell-run.

12/14-15 Hark! The Herald Angels Swing XII

6 p.m. This benefit evening for the Opera House Theatre Company includes a cabaret show, dinner and a live auction. Tickets: $60. Blockade Runner Beach Resort, 275 Waynick Blvd., Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-2251 or blockade-runner.com.

12/17 North Carolina Symphony Orchestra Concert - Holiday Pops

7:30 p.m. This evening's concert will include music from *The Polar Express* and *The Nutcracker* as well as an audience sing-along celebration. Tickets: $51. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

12/19 Merry Country Christmas

3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Live from Nashville comes a collection of toe-tapping, heartfelt music of the holidays by an array of country's finest musicians and singers. Tickets: $15-$75. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/20 Candlelight Christmas

7 p.m.-8 p.m. The Brierwood Ensemble performs a selection of traditional carol and Baroque favorites, including Charpentier's *Noels sur les instruments*. Tickets: $20. St. John's Episcopal Church, 1219 Forest Hills Drive, Wilmington. Info: (262) 227-5421 or stjohnsepiscopalchurch.org.

12/23 *It's a Wonderful Life*

4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Thalian Hall presents its annual screening of Frank Capra's classic Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Refreshments will be served. Tickets: $12. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/28 Carolina Beach State Park Half Marathon and 5K

8 a.m. A timed trial race with 13.1 and 3.1 mile courses along a scenic waterfront route. Proceeds benefit Friends of Pleasure Island State Parks. Admission: $30-

$85. Carolina Beach State Park, 1010 State Park Road, Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-8206 or its-go-time.com/carolina-beach-park-half-and-5k.

12/30 *La Cage Aux Folles*

7:30 p.m. Opera Theatre Company's Production of *La Cage Aux Folles*, a musical based on the book by Harvey Fierstein and lyrics and music by Jerry Herman. Tickets: $25-$33. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/31 New Year's Eve Gala

7 p.m. Ring in the New Year at a benefit for the legendary Thalian Hall, featuring an evening of dinner, drinks, dessert and the Opera House theatre Company's production of the Broadway classic *La Cage Aux Folles*. After the show there will be a live DJ and dancing with a champagne toast at midnight. Tickets: $165 per person. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

WEEKLY HAPPENINGS

Monday

Wrightsville Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside beach market offering a variety of fresh, locally grown produce, baked goods, plants and unique arts and crafts. Seawater Lane, Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-7925 or www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com.

Tuesday

Wine Tasting

6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free wine tasting hosted by a wine professional plus small plate specials all night. Admission: Free. The Fortunate Glass, 29 South Front St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 399-4292 or www.fortunateglass.com.

Cape Fear Blues Jam

8 p.m. A night of live music performed by the area's best Blues musicians. Bring your instrument and join in the fun. Admission: Free. The Rusty Nail, 1310 South Fifth Ave., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1888 or www.capefearblues.org.

Wednesday

Free Wine Tasting at Sweet n Savory Cafe

5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sample delicious wines for free. Pair them with a meal, dessert, or appetizer and learn more about the wines of the world. Live music starts at 7. Admission: Free. Sweet n Savory Cafe, 1611 Pavilion Place, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-0115 or www.sweetnsavorycafe.com.

Weekly Exhibition Tours

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. A weekly tour of the iconic Cameron Arts Museum, featuring presentations about the various exhibits and the selection and installation process. Cameron Arts Museum, 3201 South Seventeenth St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartsmuseum.org.

Ogden Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Local farmers, producers and artisans sell fresh fruits, veggies, plants, eggs, cheese, meat, honey, baked goods, wine, bath products and more. Ogden Park, 615 Ogden Park Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/events-calendar/ogden-farmers-market.

Poplar Grove Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Open-air market held on the front lawn of historic Poplar Grove Plantation offering fresh produce, plants, herbs, baked goods and handmade artisan crafts. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 U.S. 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.poplargrove.org/farmers-market.

Thursday

Wrightsville Beach Brewery Farmers Market

2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Come support local farmers and artisans every Thursday afternoon in the beer garden at the Wrightsville Beach Brewery. Shop for eggs, veggies, meat, honey, and handmade crafts while enjoying one of the Brewery's tasty beers. Stay for live music afterwards. Admission: Free. Wrightsville Beach Brewery, 6201 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-4938 or www.wbbeer.com.

Yoga at the CAM

12–1 p.m. Join in a soothing retreat sure to charge

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you up while you relax in a beautiful, comfortable setting. Sessions are ongoing and are open to both beginners and experienced participants. Admission: $5–8. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 South Seventeenth St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartmuseum.org.

Friday and Saturday

Cape Fear Museum Little Explorers

10 a.m. Meet your friends in Museum Park for fun, hands-on activities! Enjoy interactive circle time, conduct exciting experiments, and play games related to a weekly theme. Perfect for children ages 3 to 6 and their adult helpers. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Museum, 814 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-4370 or www.capefearmuseum.com.

Blackwater Adventure Tours

Join in an educational guided boat tour from downtown Wilmington to River Bluffs, exploring the mysterious beauty of the Northeast Cape Fear River. See website for schedule. River Bluffs, 1100 Chair Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 623-5015 or www.riverbluffsliving.com.

Saturday

Carolina Beach Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Outdoor "island-style" market featuring live music and local growers, producers and artisans selling fresh local produce, wines, meats, baked goods, herbal products and handmade crafts. Carolina Beach Lake Park, Highway 421 & Atlanta Ave., Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 458-2977 or www.carolinabeachfarmersmarket.com.

Wilmington Farmers Market at Tidal Creek

8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Weekly gathering of vetted vendors with fresh produce straight from the farm. Sign up for the weekly newsletter for advanced news of the coming weekend's harvest. 5329 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: thewilmingtonfarmersmarket.com.

Riverfront Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside market featuring local farmers, producers, artisans, crafters and live music along the banks of the Cape Fear River. Riverfront Park, North Water St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtondowntown.com/events/farmers-market.

Taste of Downtown Wilmington

2:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., & 3:15 p.m. A weekly gourmet food tour by Taste Carolina, featuring some of downtown Wilmington's best restaurants. Each time slot showcases different food. See website for details. Admission: $55–75. Riverwalk at Market St., 0 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (919) 237-2254 or www.tastecarolina.net/wilmington.

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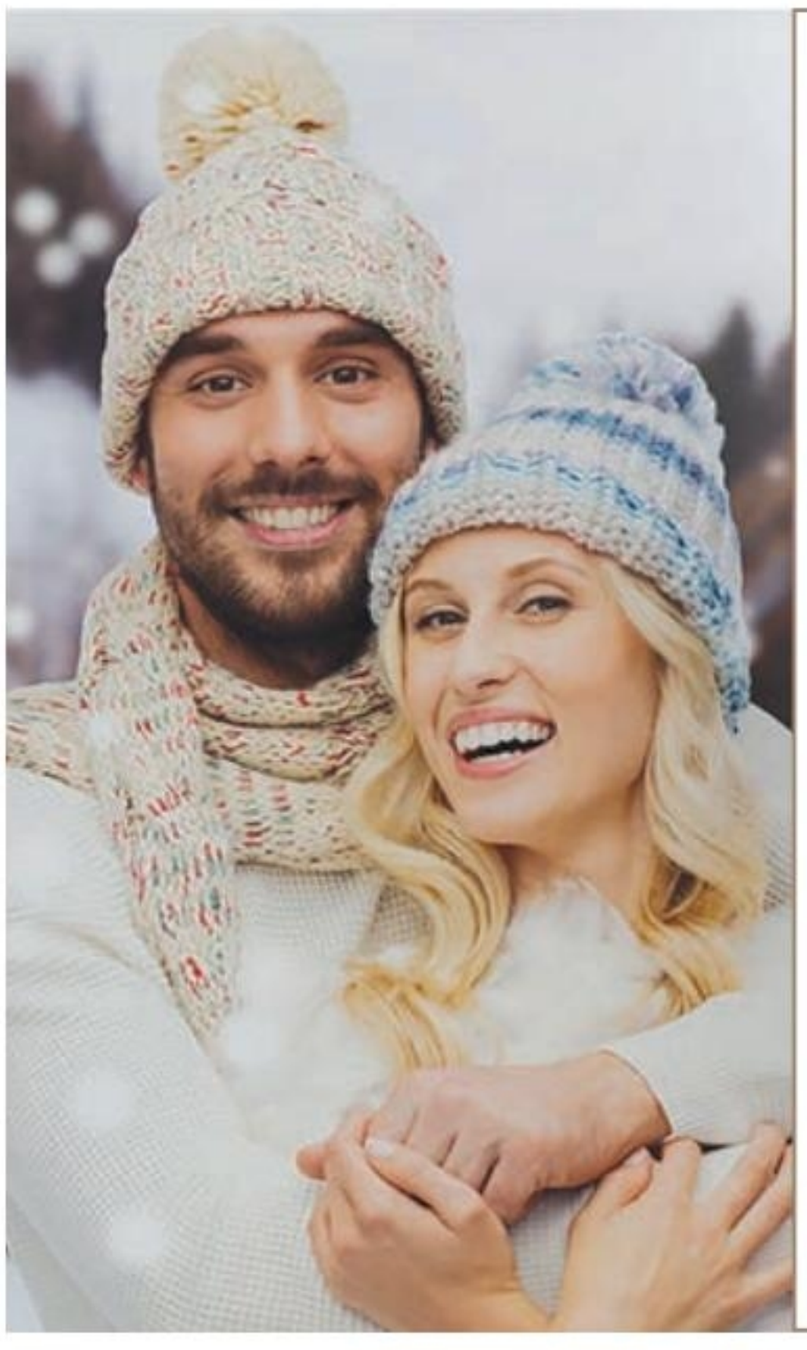

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Port City People

2019 Modernism Gala

Cameron Art Museum

Saturday, October 19, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Steve & Janice Chisholm

Mark & Niki Bloomquist, Sandra & Bart Williams

Karen & Auley Crouch

Vivian Howard, Ben Knight

Adam & Madison Carlos, Jayme Bednarczyk

Mike & Sabrina Helsabeck

Gregory & Carol Miller

Sandra Williams, Lisa Lloyd, Louise Mann

William Malloy, Maxine Terry

Mitch Brannan, Bob Warren

Darby Harris, Robert Hickman, Fern Bugg

Christopher & Lauren Loutit

Port City People

The Arty Party

KGB 16 Princess Street

Friday, November 8, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Proceeds from the Arty Party will be used to build organizational capacity for the Arts Council of Wilmington.

Rhonda Bellamy, Edie Senter, Loulie Scharf

Peter Starr, Karen Chevrotee

Fidias Reyes, Katie Crosby

John & Shannon Leas, Robin Siegel

Jim King, Jan Brewington

Mary Ann & Tom Priestley, Peggy Vineyard

Liz & Paul Hozier, Katherine Wolf Webb

Linsey & Jason Honaker

Scott Holmes, Dr. Karen Vogel, Jonas Pate, Michelle Holmes

Nancy O'Donohue, Tara Gannon

Tym Dvorak, Kelly Barnes, Drew Nayer

Aoife & Walker Taylor

Port City People

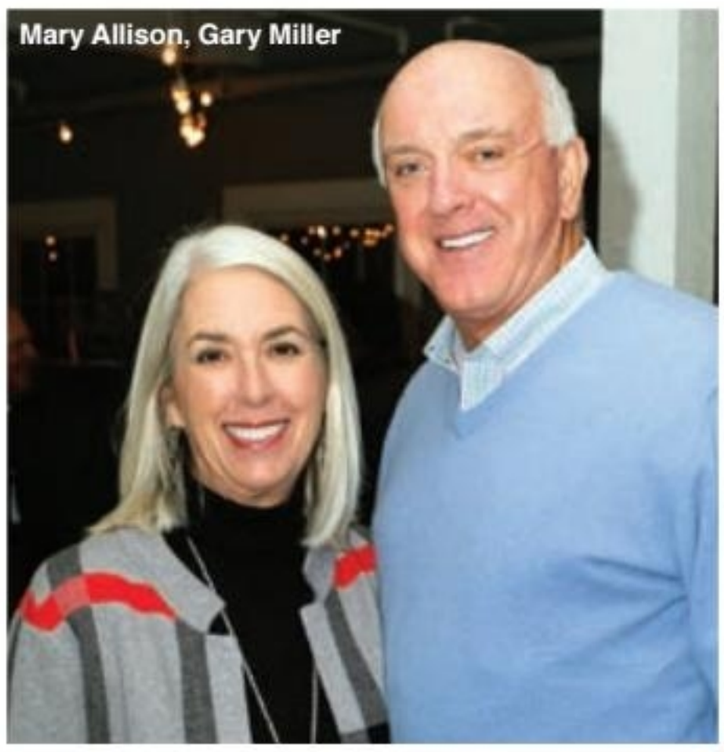
Flavor of North Carolina 2019

Carolina Yacht Club, Wrightsville Beach

November 9, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

A benefit for the Good Shepherd Center of Wilmington.


Mary Allison, Gary Miller

Jared Ellis, Jessy Elphick, Stephanie Collins, Wayne Gay

Lisa Weeks, Sandy King

Wendy Ivey, Lisa McLaughlin

Lauren McCoy, Anthony Wright

Kris & Matt Janik

John & Candice Krakuszeski, Karen Williams, Tom Demann

Dan & Susan Lewis, Brian West

Lew Woodbury, Jane Ellison, Lucien Ellison

Abby Rioux, Tanner Dodson

Nancy & Tony Dombrowski

Carter & Kristine Hubard

Port City People

2019 Champions for Children Gala - "Hollywood Night of Lights"

Presented by the Community Boys and Girls Clubs of Wilmington honoring the legacy of Windell Daniels

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Tonya Pitts, Francis Weller

Clay & Helen Brumbaugh, Dorothy & Tracy McCullen, Bo Dean

Ashley Miller, Bo Dean, Jo Conway, Gia Long

Aquasia Carr

Yvonne Smith, Elizabeth Bryant

Girard & Tracey Newkirk

Phil & Natalie Clark

Wilma Daniels, Dr. Johnson Akinleye

Jan & Ken Sarvis

Valerie Ownley, Jim Wallace

Zachary Price

More Changes Afoot

Hold your sigh of relief that 2019 is almost over because the stars predict a ride of a lifetime in 2020

By Astrid Stellanova

Humankind dances to the tune of celestial music, the sky full of stars seemingly winking at us to its beat. But there is more to know, Star Children. The universe is shifting, and its secrets will soon be revealed. We are on the verge of astrological history ahead, when Ceres, Mercury, Pluto, and Saturn line up at 22 degrees Capricorn. As we conclude a year with more drama and ruckus than anybody, even me, could have predicted, with more change coming. You ain't seen nothing yet.

The December-born, whether Sagittarius or Capricorn, make a mark so big they only need one name to remember: Beethoven, Sinatra, Disney, Matisse, Bogart. What future greats will be born this month?

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)
Honey, when you look back, you'll realize this year has been one of transformative changes. Just as Dorothy opened up the farmhouse door ('cause it's the 80th anniversary of *The Wizard of Oz* this year) to a vivid, colorful reality so different from the black-and-white one she knew in Kansas, you, too will enter a new world. Technicolor was a miracle then, and it is going to be a miracle that your own black-and-white life is drab no more!

Capricorn (December 22–January 19)
Sometimes you may feel like you're in a bewildering, upside-down and bass-ackwards family. But like a redneck marriage, even if you got a divorce, well, Sugar, you still are connected.

Aquarius (January 20–February 18)
Would you be willing to go all in for your dreams to come true? What would you eliminate? Strip away? Like a lady of the night promised for the right price, "Everthang but my earrings."

Pisces (February 19–March 20)
A reckoning is ahead. Might as well be rolled in meal and fried in lard if you don't face facts. It's sometimes more important to be honest than to be right. Darlin', here comes your truth test.

Aries (March 21–April 19)
You found yourself after a lot of searching, Sweet Pea, like finding a car when they mowed the yard. Treasure found! Keep the grass cut and enjoy the wheels of discovery.

Taurus (April 20–May 20)
Holy shiplap! Here is you, your fine self, doing honest work and feeling good about yourself. How's it feel, Honey Bun? Can you admit that it wasn't so hard after all to be a team player?

Gemini (May 21–June 20)
It don't require a trip up the hog's rear end to know where there's bacon. Despite everything, you seem to want to do things the hard way. Maybe this is a time to reconnoiter.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)
Sugar, it's like buying a camouflage toilet seat: You will still get busted when you miss. If you spend too much time on covering up the possibility of error, you don't gain a dang thing.

Leo (July 23–August 22)
Like being too drunk to fish, your life has been a contradiction in terms. Seems like you want two entirely different paths, but can't see they eventually converge in the — say whaaaat? — parking lot.

Virgo (August 23–September 22)
Mind your own biscuits, and life will be milk gravy. You got so close to the dream, then you changed your order when you heard somebody else talking to the waitress. Find your truest ground.

Libra (September 23–October 22)
Saw the T-shirt that says, "You ain't Baroque. You're just out of Monet." Like the person who printed it, you have a sense of humor and it must be used. In the toughest of times, it will save you, Funny Bunny.

Scorpio (October 23–November 21)
You keep wondering why folks don't get you. You love the South, a good story, and home for the holidays. Truthfully, you ain't as mysterious as people think. You're just better-dressed.

For years, Astrid Stellanova owned and operated Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon in the boondocks of North Carolina until arthritic fingers and her popular astrological readings provoked a new career path.

The Chainsaw Saga

By Clyde Edgerton

I am groggy (after a nap) when, chainsaw in hand, I head for the small, dead tree in the yard adjoining our yard. My neighbor has asked me to cut it down — and I'm always looking for an excuse to use our trusty chainsaw. My youngest son, age 14, is with me. This is a good parent-child bonding opportunity. Had my daughter been around — same.

One thing I can teach my children is that old Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared. Gas and chain oil are nearby, as well as a spare chain. "See, I'm prepared," I say to my son.

As we walk up to the tree, I set the toggle switch to "choke," pull the crank cord, reset the toggle switch to normal, pull the cord again. "Wang-wang." It's running. Sweet.

My son points to the chainsaw. Covering the chainsaw bar and chain is a lightweight orange plastic sleeve — a safety cover. I've forgotten to remove it. I haven't even seen it. The sleeve is there for a reason: The bare chain, with the engine off, is sharp enough cut you.

You are, of course, supposed to take that plastic cover off before cranking the engine, but being groggy from my nap, I'd been . . . well, groggy from my nap. I'd forgotten.

When I grab the sleeve to remove it, I do not realize that the engine is idling at a good clip and thus the chain is rotating rapidly. In less than a second, I pinch the plastic just enough for the rotating chain to 1) engage the sleeve; 2) cut through it and into my middle finger; and 3) shoot the plastic sleeve off the chain. It lands about 20 feet away.

I look at my finger, look away, and manage to quickly cut off the chainsaw and place it on the ground. I look at my finger again. The cut, just above that first joint, is deep, and jagged, and I see something white. The skin is kind of like a large flap, if you know what I mean. I am not prepared for this.

But while in pain — during this emergency — I'll be a role model for my son. Isn't there another part of the Boy Scout motto somewhere that says Be Brave or Be Calm or something like that?

My son walks over and I show him. Blood is flowing. Normally, I would be able to deliver a lecture: "Be prepared: thick gloves, removal of chain sleeve."

But now that's out the window, I'll Be Brave and Calm. I'll be a role model.

My wife is not at home, so my oldest son, 16, with a driver's permit, will have to take me to Urgent Care or the Emergency Room. He calls Urgent Care. They are open. We will go there — and avoid a long wait, perhaps.

I'm in the car and my oldest son is driving. The youngest decided to sit out this next part. I'm holding my right hand up, my left providing towel pressure on that middle finger to stanch the bleeding.

"What happened?" he says.

I tell him.

He says, "Aren't you supposed to . . . "

"Yes," I say.

We are at an intersection. "Which way?" he asks. I tell him.

We are at another intersection. "Which way?" he asks. I tell him.

This happens a few times.

We finally park and walk into the large Urgent Care waiting room. Ah! It's empty! What luck. We walk over to the little window. The receptionist smiles, then sees blood. "Oh, my goodness," she says. "Can I get your insurance card and an ID?"

With my good hand I reach for my billfold. Back left pocket.

The pocket is empty.

"Forgot my billfold," I say. I'm sure my smile doesn't mask the deep pain in my eyes. "Can I go get it after my finger is sewed up?" I ask. "My son has a permit only, and I'd have to ride back with him home to get my billfold. And then back here."

"I'm sorry sir. We can't treat you if we don't have an ID and insurance information."

We are at an intersection. "Which way?" he asks. I tell him.

"How could you forget your wallet?" he asks.

I don't answer. Then I say, "It's a billfold."

"Not these days, Dad." We are at an intersection. "Which way?" he asks.

"Straight ahead. Then right at the stop light."

"I can't believe you forgot your wallet," he says.

Not only will I stay calm and brave, I will be humble.

I retrieve the billfold. When we get back to Urgent Care, six people sit in the waiting area — honest — with two standing at the window.

About a half-hour later, I'm in a room waiting for the doctor. My son is with me. I want him to see my calmness. The doctor comes and explains that getting stitches means you must lie down on the patient table, so that you can't watch and faint. So OK. To deaden my finger before the stitches go in, the doctor will give me a couple of shots. It's a very long needle. The very long needle will be inserted all the way into the joint on one side of my middle knuckle. I tell myself to stay calm. The needle goes in.

I scream. Then, "What the hell," I say. That kind of pain has to be rare.

The needle is then inserted into the joint on the other side of my middle knuckle. I scream again.

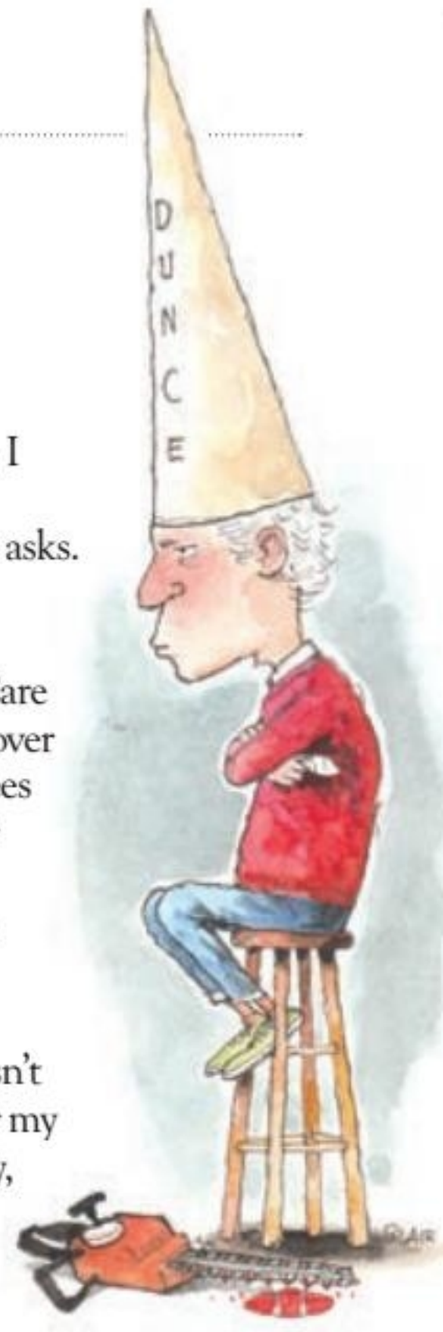
In about 10 minutes six stitches go in. No pain.

As I prepare to return a couple of weeks later for stitches removal, I don't ask my sons or daughter to go with me to the doctor for any role model stuff.

They've learned enough from Papadaddy.

Be prepared. Be brave. Be calm.

Clyde Edgerton is the author of 10 novels, a memoir and most recently, Papadaddy's Book for New Fathers. *He is the Thomas S. Kenan III Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at UNCW.*



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